

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM IN THE VIEW OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to know what community health agents think about the environment problematic. This was a qualitative approach research, of the exploratory-descriptive kind, which was carried out with community health agents that take part of teams of the family health strategy, of a city in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. The data were collected in October, 2010, through a semistructured interview and they were analyzed based on the reference suggested for content analysis. The subjects noticed a convergence between the natural and the social dimension when they think about the environment. Demonstrated belief in the intimate relation between health and environment and also that having responsible about the environment issue, especially through the promotion of health. It was concluded that a need by addressing for environmental education in order to strengthen the community health agents' competencies for the promotion of health, based on presuppositions that value the interface between health and environment, helping the individuals and the community to face the socio-environmental situations and in the prevention of the problems that come from the human exposure to environment problems.

Keywords: Environment. Public Health. Environmental Education. Health Promotion.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that we live in a time of planetary crisis has been widespread, especially through the dissemination of news about catastrophic climate events and their relationship to the process of environmental destruction. Although contemporary subjects are encouraged, through the media, to develop environmental preservation, this does not seem to be a widely held practice. However, the severity of the environmental crisis of planetary proportions of citizens requires behavior change, in order to seek greater involvement with current environmental demands, which affect various dimensions of human living process. After all, humans rely on local ecosystems and the global environment to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, health is threatened by environmental problems, which implies changes in lifestyle⁽¹⁾.

According to the Report of the 1st National Conference on Environmental Health⁽²⁾, conducted in 2010, in Brazil there are at least three dimensions of vulnerability between health

and the environment. The first is linked to inadequate environmental sanitation, resulting in the prevalence of major public health problems, the second dimension relates to the negative health effects of development models in our country, resulting in processes of rapid industrialization, sprawl soil and intense urbanization, the third dimension is linked to the emerging threats arising from global-scale environmental phenomena, especially the health impact, resulting from global warming generated by climate change.

Thus, it appears that healthy living depends intrinsically human quality of life and environmental summoning workers to heed to environmental aspects in their care practice⁽³⁾. Therefore, it is up to the health sector, not only to prevent risks, in order to provide answers to the impacts of environmental and climate change, but act to reduce social vulnerabilities through changes in individual behavior, social and political, for a fairer and healthier. An important strategy pointed it relates to the awareness of the effects of climate change on the health of both the general public and of the

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various sectors, including the staff of the health sector⁽⁴⁾.

The development of an environmental awareness and actions, environmentally friendly, by the various workers involved in health care is crucial. At this point, we highlight the community health agents (CHA), which, by integrating teams of the Family Health Strategy (FHS) and act very closely communities have an important role in this process. These workers carry out activities outside the environment of care units, close to the patient, which allows greater contact with the population and their family environment⁽⁵⁾.

Noteworthy is also the important role of community health workers in promoting health and better quality of life to the people, in order that their work process provides greater proximity to the community, enabling discussion of real situations, which could result in damage to health, the environment, or to its preservation. Furthermore, as members of a team of ESF, the ACS foster the link between the community and the other members of that team. Thus, it is understood that they are social actors indispensable for the realization of a process of promoting and restoring health, the fundamental logic of interaction health and the environment, based on environmental education.

The expanded understanding of primary care, including the environmental dimension in the process of health of individuals and communities, implies the promotion of local environmental health, because it seeks to develop strategies for social participation, from knowledge, identifying and solving environmental problems, that influence health and limit the quality of life and sustainability of a given region⁽⁶⁾.

In this context, it is pertinent to discuss about the involvement of community health workers in the process of promoting health and quality of life from the perspective of the interface between health and environment. It is understood that propitious thoughts on this subject can contribute significantly to leverage the debate on these issues, which are considered crucial, not only to promote the health of populations, but also for the development of environmental preservation.

Thus, the study had the research question: what think the community health workers about environmental issues? Therefore, the objective was to know what they think the community health workers about the environmental issues.

METHODOLOGY

The research was descriptive and exploratory, qualitative approach. Was performed with 13 ACS a city in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, linked to the ESF. The subjects were chosen randomly by lot, and identified with the letter "S" followed by the number for the order of the interview, and the sample definition was given by theoretical saturation. They are formed as inclusion criteria: be acting as ACS for over a year and take up the case.

Data were collected in October 2010, through semi-structured interview, containing questions prepared by the researchers in order to achieve the objective of the study. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researchers themselves.

The examination of the data followed the steps provided for content analysis⁽⁷⁾. Thus, after a meeting of the material, we performed a pre-analysis (initial reading); depth analysis with organization of categories and interpretation of results and discussion, based on the literature. The study was approved by the Ethics in Research (CAEE 0224.0.243.000-10).

Data analysis allowed the emergence of four categories of analysis, namely: conception of the environment: convergence between the natural and the social, the environmental problem: between the impact and the need for educational, environmental responsibility: commitment to health promotion; training: the necessary overcoming gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conception about the environment: convergence between the natural and the social

From the testimony of ACS, it became clear that the interviewees perceive the environment as the place where the individual is inserted, expressed as follows:

I think is everything that involves the medium in which us lives, eg, the nature, the community, everything is the environment. (S11)

It is observed that the agents have a broad concept about the environment, since they consider as the place where they operate, including the social point of view. This view is very important, as it leads to apprehension that, for these respondents, the environment has a connotation only biologicist. Obviously, understanding the conceptual aspects of the environment, as a way of interpreting the environments and their interrelationships, to save you and, if necessary, to preserve it, is a fundamental aspect for the realization of practices aimed at environmental education and health promotion.

However, it also appears among women a vision naturalized environment, as shown below:

It's all set, if so, the nature, air, atmosphere, this is it ... In general ... rivers, forests. (S12)

It can be inferred from the previous statement, there is a glimpse into the natural world, from the perspective naturalized focused and independent of interaction with the human cultural world. The consequence of this view, purely naturalistic, is to reduce the design environment only one of its dimensions, ignoring the richness of the interaction between nature and human culture⁽⁸⁾.

Another aspect pointed out by the respondents with regard to the existence of links between health and environment, and the inability of existing health in an unhealthy environment:

The environmental influences on health. If the environment is not good, also my health will not be good. Directly influences. (S6)

Creating supportive environments implies recognizing the complexity of societies and relations of interdependence between different sectors, from, from protecting the environment to monitor the impact that changes in the environment have on health. Of course, these issues need to be greater emphasis on the health agenda⁽¹⁴⁾. To this end, the Ministry of Health has implemented a system of Environmental Health Surveillance to improve model performance in the NHS, providing skills that focus on the implementation of actions in which

it is found in the relationship between human health, environmental degradation and contamination⁽¹⁰⁾. However, what is perceived, yet, is the absence of a policy applied to a system of health surveillance and active environment within the National Health System, which provides subsidies to a practice that integrates these two concepts, the natural and social satisfactorily, regarding the development of health, as well as strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities.

The purpose of health promotion involves a design that does not restrict health the absence of disease but which is capable of acting on its determinants, proposing that intersectoral actions that go beyond the provision of clinical care, involving education, environment, recreation, access to essential goods and services, among others, relating directly to the living conditions and health of the population⁽¹⁵⁾. Unease is also revealed in the depositions of ACS when reporting environmental preservation as a means of ensuring the health of the community through health promotion.

Environmental issues: between the impact and the need for educational actions

Thinking about the environmental crisis is an important step to promote a change in behavior, so that we can better understand environmental issues, promoting an act more aware of health professionals. In this sense, to talk about environmental issues, the ACS expressed concern educate individuals, especially children, about the environmental issues. Also outlined a concern about the scarcity of natural resources and the future of future generations, which was evident in the report:

[...] The environment is degraded, nature, pollution, near here, also has a stream. Before a few years ago, the water was clean, now no more clean water, everything is dirty, the staff throws trash, even the staff is polluting what could be useful to them. (S8)

Note that the agents have the perception that the environmental issue is urgent today. The disclosure, especially through the media, that the planet has been hit by disasters resulting from environmental degradation, just impacting most subjects, that expresses, strikingly, a concern with the finiteness of natural resources and the

future the planet. In this sense, there might also be a concern to perform an activity in education with children, because, in the view of many, that they will face, more intensely, the effects of environmental problems.

Therefore, discussing environmental education in schools is essential to provide students tools to enable them to reflect on the world in which they live, and this includes understanding the vital dependence in relation to the environment ⁽⁹⁾; constituting the environmental education as a mechanism for building future consciousness.

There are, also, through the testimony of agents, the relationship of environmental problems with the emergence of the disease, given that increasingly demands increase and health problems related to the environment ⁽¹⁰⁾. For this bias, the ACS report that develop strategies to minimize the detrimental effects on the environment in which the subjects live and on workers' health.

One of these strategies, identified as a potential care is health promotion, as a form of health education of the population. Thus, actions, and practices developed by ACS have as a guiding practices to promote and protect health. For this, the / a health agent seeks to work with the promotion, in order to legitimize their work across the community and health professionals, which enables increased capacity for autonomy in the processes of health and disease ⁽¹¹⁾. Nevertheless, the data also show a different positioning for other subjects in accordance with the following statement:

I did not stop to think yet. (S5)

This fact is remarkable, since no reflection shows that this agent for this topic probably not part of their daily work. It can be considered that this is a gap that interferes significantly in their professional action, to the extent that fail to include in their education practices and health promotion this fundamental aspect of the interface between health and environment.

Environmental responsibility: commitment with health promotion

In general, it was found that the CHA understand environmental responsibility as a commitment to work, and would be linked to health promotion in the community, since, in

their daily lives constantly, are guiding people on how to reduce threats to health. This concern was evident following:

The responsibility is great, because we work with health, with prevention. So we have to work with environmental issues also guiding the community. (S11)

Thus, the respondents emphasized that their responsibility was linked to tackling environmental issues. Working in healthcare, focusing on the environmental field is a way of working, based on practices of mutual help and solidarity relations in dealing with problems, which also means to recognize the right of human beings to live in a healthy environment and be informed about the influence of the environmental problems in their health, well-being and survival, positioning them as co-responsible for the protection, conservation and rehabilitation and, consequently, health ⁽⁶⁾.

In this perspective, working on health issues, based on environmental education, in view of its inherent educational character evokes points to be overcome and the relationship between humans and nature, which are fundamental to the realization of a new and different way of coexistence with the environment ⁽¹²⁾.

In this sense, it is emphasized that environmental education needs to be recognized and recommended to become an essential part of education for all citizens, contributing effectively to sustainable concepts and attitudes about the relationship of humans with the natural environment and cultural are appropriate and internalized in the context of local actions undertaken by all actors of Brazilian society ⁽¹³⁾. Thus, the evidence of the interface between health and the environment is fundamental to the process of health promotion, and this aspect has been demarcated in the study.

The reorganization of primary care, according to the FHS, proposes to incorporate the ACS team work in health, actions that promote community empowerment, expanding their ability to cope with their health problems. Thus, the main feature of ACS to act in the gap between the community and health facility that provides comprehensive vision of the subject, since they are considered links between the community and health facility, with the function of promoting approaches and develop linkages

in its catchment area. This bond is given, as the agents know the community, and establishing a relationship of trust between all actors involved: user, ACS and health unit.

Approaching health professionals assisted the population is the main task of the ACS, in view of the importance of this action by the team work in the promotion and development of integrated strategies in pursuit of health, so that will be more resolving, the better the bond entire team and community.

In this study it was clear, in the manifestations of the agents, the environmental preservation actions performed by them in day-to-day, or at work are seen as a way of strengthening the individual / community health in the process. On being questioned about the development of some action of environmental preservation in their daily lives, the agents thus expressed:

Absolutely, yes, we, back in my home, we have the habit of separating the trash and even your health, all with your food, with your health. We care enough, so the waste that goes into the garden, which gives the garbage to put trash in there, we do this separation. (S1)

Observe that the actions are related to the separation of waste into recyclable or organic, and there is concern that in performing some kind of action for environmental preservation in the household. This fact is remarkable, as it indicates that most respondents ACS performs, on an individual level, some kind of reflection on the subject and seeks to develop actions, even if isolated, environmental preservation. However, when asked about the development of any such action, in the context of the work, it became evident that, in health facilities, no educational activities accordingly:

Environmental preservation only from us, the agents, for our knowledge ... would be more individual, but not a global action, as a team, I do not know what the team is doing external nor internal staff know what we're doing on the street. (S6)

One can perceive a commitment of ACS, with regard to issues of environmental preservation, both in their daily living activities while as health workers. However, it is noteworthy the fact that such activities relate to education and preservation are developed by

individual self-interest. None of the agents mentioned the existence of a project or an orientation on the part of health units to conduct environmental preservation with the community, which obviously reflects, on the one hand, the non-inclusion of this debate in the context of the performance of family health teams and on the other, constitutes a reflection of the difficulties that have been encountered in relation to the composition of these teams in the county where they were collected research data.

Enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities, and the development of public policies and conditions favorable to health are health promotion strategies. Thus, it is essential that the environmental dimension is incorporated into the range of actions at the level of primary care, in order to achieve improved quality of life, especially their health conditions ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Vocational training: the necessary overcoming gaps

When ACS were asked about the existence of education initiatives in service, in relation to the interface between health and environment, there was a clear lack of elements that provide subsidies to approach this issue with the population, as can be seen below:

Very little. And that most training is spoken a little about the environment. Not directly applicable. (S6)

Thus, we note that, although there are some positive reports from ACS regarding conducting trainings, they pointed to a correlation indirectly on the subject. It was observed, furthermore, that the meeting took place when the need to solve specific problems arising in the environment of vectors, such as dengue.

It was realized then that ACS did not feel manipulated for addressing issues relating to the interface between health and the environment with the population, since there was a promotion of a formal reflective process on the issue, but only one debate on specific some subjects. Thus, the testimony revealed the difficulties these workers to deal with the important task of promoting the health of people and communities, from references based on environmental education process.

Therefore, the continuing health education would allow larger learning spaces in the

workplace, providing a critical reflection of the work processes, making them more participatory and professional building solutions collectively⁽¹⁷⁾.

By rethinking the formation of ACS, so that they can better perform their professional role, could be an important tool for the implementation of environmental education in their training. In this perspective, there is a need to implement a set of initiatives that take into account the relevant social partners as participants and assets through educational practices and a process of informed dialogue Mutual, which reinforces a sense of co-responsibility and constitution ethical values. Environmental education points to pedagogical proposals centered on criticality and the emancipation of individuals, aiming at changing behavior and attitudes to the development of social organization and collective participation⁽¹⁸⁾ as a driver of health actions.

Thus, more than necessary, it is urgent to adopt health actions linked with the vision of environmental subjects, as well as the improvement of concepts relating to health and the environment, the FHS teams, particularly the ACS. This is crucial, especially when considering that these workers have the potential to strengthen the ESF, collaborating in the organization of health care, to act together to multidisciplinary teams, developing actions of care and health protection of individuals and social groups in households and communities⁽¹⁹⁾.

A reflection on the interface between health and the environment may constitute lever for achieving completeness in assisting individuals, as recommended by the SUS. After all, there is the immense challenge of seeking the balance of the delicate balance between environment and health, and an ecological and social debt to future generations that forces seeking healthier

lifestyles. Therefore, the search for balance and sustainability can only be achieved from a broad mobilization of the people⁽¹⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before the testimony, shown here, we conclude that subjects have a broad concept about the environment, since they consider the environment where they are inserted social groups, encompassing the dimensions: natural and social. Regarding environmental issues, the ACS have the perception that it is an urgent issue today, outlining a concern about the scarcity of natural resources and the future of future generations.

It was noticed, too, that the issue of environmental responsibility is seen as a work commitment to be linked to health promotion in the community, since, during the work, the agents are constantly guiding people on how to prevent the diseases. In this sense, become relevant reflections that can help to build new meanings for the formation and work of the ACS.

It is believed that the inclusion of the discussion of environmental issues in health care practice enables new approaches, aiming to increase the understanding of the process to be healthy as a result, also the interaction of humans with the environment. Thus, environmental education can promote information, triggering the welfare, health protection, environmental conservation, becoming as a driver of health actions by the ACS.

It is hoped that this study may contribute to further investigations that address aspects of the interface between health and environment, an exercise professional to guide more responsible and conscious of environmental issues before.

A PROBLEMÁTICA AMBIENTAL NA VISÃO DE AGENTES COMUNITÁRIOS DE SAÚDE

RESUMO

O estudo objetivou conhecer o que pensam os agentes comunitários de saúde acerca da problemática ambiental. Tratou-se de uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, do tipo descritivo-exploratória, realizada com agentes comunitários de saúde integrantes de equipes de estratégia de saúde da família de um município do interior do Rio Grande do Sul. Os dados foram coletados em outubro de 2010, por meio de entrevista semiestruturada e analisados com base no referencial proposto para análise de conteúdo. Os sujeitos perceberam uma convergência entre as dimensões natural e social, ao pensarem sobre o meio ambiente. Demonstraram acreditar na íntima relação entre saúde e meio ambiente, bem como possuir responsabilidade

frente à questão ambiental, especialmente, por meio da promoção da saúde. Concluiu-se que existe a necessidade de abordar a educação ambiental, com vistas a fortalecer as competências do agente comunitário de saúde para a promoção da saúde, com base em pressupostos que valorizem a interface entre saúde e meio ambiente, potencializando os indivíduos e comunidade no enfrentamento dos determinantes socioambientais e na prevenção dos agravos decorrentes da exposição humana a problemas ambientais.

Palavras-chave: Meio Ambiente. Saúde Pública. Educação Ambiental. Promoção da Saúde.

LOS PROBLEMAS AMBIENTALES EN LA VISIÓN DE AGENTES COMUNITARIOS DE SALUD

RESUMEN

El estudio tuvo por objetivo conocer lo que piensan los agentes comunitarios de salud sobre la problemática ambiental. Estudio de abordaje cualitativo, de tipo descriptivo exploratorio, realizado con agentes comunitarios de salud integrantes de equipos de estrategia de salud de la familia, de un municipio del interior de Rio Grande do Sul. Los datos fueron colectados en octubre de 2010, por medio de entrevista semiestructurada y analizados con base en el referencial propuesto para análisis de contenido. Los sujetos notaron una convergencia entre las dimensiones natural y social, al pensar sobre el medio ambiente. Demostraron creer en la estrecha relación entre la salud y el medio ambiente, así como tener responsabilidad frente a la cuestión ambiental, especialmente por medio de la promoción de la salud. Se llegó a la conclusión de que existe una necesidad de abordar la educación ambiental con el fin de fortalecer las competencias de agente comunitario de salud para la promoción de la salud, con base en presupuestos que valoricen la interfaz entre la salud y el medio ambiente, potencializando los individuos y comunidad en el enfrentamiento de los determinantes socioambientales y en la prevención de los agravios decorrentes de la exposición humana a problemas ambientales.

Palabras clave: Ambiente. Salud Pública. Educación Ambiental. Promoción de la Salud.

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