
CRACK SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ELABORATED BY USERS UNDER TREATMENT¹

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ABSTRACT. The main goal of this research was to know and to analyze the content and the structure of crack social representation, elaborated by drug addicts under treatment. This study was conducted in a psychiatric institution of João Pessoa-PB (Brazil), with 30 crack users. Two instruments were used: an interview, which was analyzed by the Thematic Content Analysis; and the Free Word Association Technique, with the tag "crack," which was analyzed from the EVOC program. It was found a negative representation of the crack, where it is embodied in the figure of the Devil, having enough power to destroy its users' lives and the society in general. It was also observed that this representation is made up by negative elements which evidence the sadness and the suffering that permeate the crack users reality. The results found are expected to aid state offices to bring out public policies in order to find this problematic issue a solution, which is able to encompass the psychosocial aspects of the crack usage.

Keywords: Crack; drug addicts under treatment; social representations.

REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DO CRACK ELABORADAS POR USUÁRIOS EM TRATAMENTO

RESUMO. Objetivou-se conhecer e analisar o conteúdo e a estrutura da representação social do crack elaborada por dependentes químicos em tratamento. Este estudo foi realizado em uma instituição psiquiátrica de João Pessoa-PB, com 30 usuários de crack. Foram utilizados dois instrumentos: uma entrevista, a qual foi analisada por meio da análise de conteúdo temática e a técnica de associação livre de palavras, com o estímulo "crack", que foi analisada a partir do programa EVOC. Constatou-se uma representação negativa do crack, em que ele é personificado na figura do Diabo, tendo o poder de destruir a vida de seus usuários e da sociedade em geral. Observou-se, ainda, que essa representação é composta por elementos negativos que evidenciam a tristeza e o sofrimento que permeiam a realidade do usuário de crack. Espera-se que os resultados encontrados possam auxiliar os órgãos competentes na formação de políticas públicas voltadas para esta problemática, capazes de abarcar os aspectos psicossociais do consumo de crack.

Palavras-chave: crack; usuários em tratamento; representações sociais.

REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DEL CRACK ELABORADAS POR USUARIOS EN TRATAMIENTO

RESUMEN. El objetivo fue conocer y analizar el contenido y la estructura de la representación social del crack, elaborada por dependientes químicos en tratamiento. Este estudio fue realizado en una institución psiquiátrica de João Pessoa-PB, con 30 usuarios de crack. Fueron utilizados dos instrumentos: una entrevista, que fue analizada por medio

¹ *Support:* Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

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del Análisis de Contenido Temático; y, la Técnica de Asociación Libre de Palabras, con el estímulo "crack", que fue analizada a partir del programa EVOc. Se constató una representación negativa del crack, el que es personificado en la figura del Diablo, teniendo el poder de destruir la vida de sus usuarios y de la sociedad en general. Se observó aún que esa representación está compuesta por elementos negativos que evidencian la tristeza y el sufrimiento que comprenden la realidad del usuario de crack. Se espera que los resultados encontrados puedan auxiliar a los órganos competentes en la formación de políticas públicas dirigidas hacia esta problemática, capaces de abarcar los aspectos psicosociales del consumo de crack.

Palabras clave: Crack; usuarios en tratamiento; representaciones sociales.

The relationship among individual, society and the drug phenomenon has permeated the whole existence of mankind. Since prehistoric times, man has been making use of psychoactive substances for multiple purposes, which extend from lucid purposes, strictly hedonistic, to the religious, social and medical uses today. By the end of the nineteenth century, these uses were rarely designed as threatening to the constituted social order so that the abuse and the socially disintegrating use is a contemporary phenomenon (Silva, 2007).

Nowadays, the drug abuse is understood under the banner of social problem and is target of discussions and questions by various segments of the society. The issue about drugs is one of the major factors of social marginalization, permeating frequent discussions on current media, demanding answers from the public authorities and the society in general. Just because it is a social problem, this question becomes the object of public policies aimed at reducing, inhibiting and preventing its causes as well as minimizing the consequences (Souza et al., 2013).

In this context, the crack addiction is highlighted. This drug emerged in the Brazilian context in the 1990s, and that is evident today due to many factors, including the growth of consumption and the high rates of hospitalizations resulting from its use (Vargens, Cruz & Santos, 2011). As any drug use is associated with the biopsychosocial factors, the crack use is no different. In addition to physical problems, there are the psychological, social and legal orders; so that, in the current Brazilian scenario, the user opens a serious and complex picture of social exclusion (Duailibi, Vieira & Laranjeira, 2011).

The crack users are coated with an imaginary which sends them to the enjoyment, to the irresponsibility, to the crime and to the confrontation to the habits and social customs. Because of this, there is not much availability of the society in general to hear about their experiences and livingness, not for the meaning that this drug gets in their lives (Oliveira & Dias, 2010).

In this sense, pejorative speeches are released, which are shared socially, linking the drug user's image as a "deviant" being. Especially when they are associated with substances with increasingly euphoric effects, highlighted as the causers of the problems that go beyond the organic dimension of the subject, then taking worrying social proportions.

As a result, this study aimed to identify and to analyze the content and the structure of the crack social representation, elaborated by drug addicts under treatment. The scope of the proposed objective can provide scientific data to assist the competent authorities in the development of public policies and intervention strategies to encompass the psychosocial aspects involving crack abuse in today's society.

Theoretical Foundation

Crack is a form of cocaine, which may be obtained by transformation of this drug by chemical reactions with other substances. Unlike the glamour attached to pure cocaine, as the drug of ups and sophisticated social strata, the crack occupied a market niche with the poorest and most marginalized sectors of the population (Carneiro, 2005). With the USA prohibitionist policy, there was an intensification of control over chemical inputs needed to produce cocaine, which contributed to the emergence of crack in the 1980s, in the slums of Los Angeles, New York and Miami. To avoid financial losses, traffickers then started to produce the crack, which is a less pure form of cocaine, as they are added other products to it, which caused the crack became a cheaper drug and therefore more easily saleable (Domanico, 2007).

In Brazil, the use of crack was detected by reducing damage in the early 1990s. According to Oliveira and Nappo (2008), the Brazilian traffickers used clever market strategies to attract consumers to crack, depleting the reserves of other drugs in distribution points. This fact facilitated the beginning of the accession to crack consumption in Brazil.

From that time, it was observed that the government was triggered with intensity, both by the spontaneous demand from the own crack users, and by their families because of the drug effects (Oliveira & Dias, 2010). According to Dualibi, Ribeiro and Laranjeira (2008) in the mid-1990s, the users of cocaine and crack, which was initially composed less than a fifth of outpatient demand for illicit drugs, began to occupy among 50% and 80% of the vacancies which were offered by the health facilities to such treatment.

Currently, we can see an increase in the crack consumption and the problems related to it in Brazil, as evidenced by research in the area (Brazil, 2013; INPAD, 2012). According to Santos and Souza (2010), the reasons for such growth may be related to the following factors: increased availability of the drug; easy to be used; it has a low cost; and its effect, which leads to greater dependence.

This increase in drug consumption as well as the understanding of this phenomenon is linked to several factors, and one should embrace beyond the subject and his subjectivity, the socio-cultural context which he is inserted. In this perspective, one of the concerns that Romani (2008) stands out is the reductionist approach to the issue of drugs, which prioritizes the positivist imprint of actions, subordinating the importance of the subjectivity in the social actions. Thus, it is proposed that, from these epistemological premises, the social scientist should work with the complexity of the social life, addressing the issue of drug use as a total social phenomenon, noting the intertwining of the different plans.

Romani (2008) adds that the limits of sanitary interventions in the field of drugs conducted by the modern states are due to the adoption of the contagionist paradigm, which contributed to an individualization vision of the diseases and the users' stigmatization. After noting these limits, he argues that a new turning point is necessary for the social representations of the phenomenon that are more homologous with what actually occurs in the practice and not with today's ideological inclination; proposing the deconstruction and modification of the hegemonic model in which the subject is currently involved.

Given the foregoing, it can be observed that the crack is a drug of great social impact, with concern by various social segments. In order to understand the psychosocial factors that involve the use of crack in the society, this issue was investigated in the Social Representations Theory (SRT); seeking to thus understand the multiplicity of factors that mediate the drug phenomenon, combining socio-structural, subjective and symbolic dimensions involving the consumers and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are immersed with their particular dynamic, expanding the analysis angle in addition to the drugs theme.

Social representations can be understood as a particular knowledge system, which aims at communication among the individuals and the elaboration of behavior, being symbolic sets that are, at the same time, practical and dynamic (Moscovici, 2011). A social representation is the sign and the reproduction of a socially valued object, even if that object is unfamiliar, strange to the individuals' cognition. Therefore, the object of this study, the crack, can be considered as an object of social representation, taking into consideration it is a part of the daily lives of the individuals studied, i.e., the people who make use of this substance, but also of the society as a whole, by mobilizing affects, controversy and raising polemics.

It should be stressed that the SRT unfolds in some theoretical and methodological trends. The main ones are the *dimensional*, *structural* and *societal* approaches. This study is based on the SRT dimensional and structural approaches, since they care to know the content and the structure of the crack social representation.

The dimensional approach is characterized by the study of the representational contents, covering the whole of expressions, ideas, images and values that circulate in the discourse on the object. Furthermore, it is concerned with the construction processes of the representation, on which stand two processes: the objectification and the anchoring (Arruda, 2002). The anchoring is a mechanism that articulates strange ideas, reducing them to the common categories and images, placing them in a

family context, in which the social actor appropriates this object and prints his subjectivity and his socio-cultural context. As the objectification is the process by which the components of the representation organize themselves and acquire materiality, making the abstract to concrete, giving themselves an image, a material counterpart (Moscovici, 2011).

Thus, the dimensional approach is fundamentally concerned with the content of a representation, trying to capture the different moments and movements of its preparation. However, for Abric (2001a, 2001b), it is not enough to know the content of a representation to define it, being necessary to identify its core, because this is what gives it meaning and what governs its transformation. Accordingly, two representations can have the same content but different meanings in the view of its structure. Thus, highlights the structural approach of SRT.

According to Abric (2001b), the social representations are made up of two components: the core and the peripheral elements. The central system consists of the central core of the representation, and deeply rooted in the collective memory of a group and oriented by its system of norms and values. The core is stable, resistant to change and coherent, being responsible for the continuity, consistency and permanence of the representation. The peripheral system, in turn, is characterized by its functionality as it is governed by immediate contextual factors, and constantly updating and contextualizing the regulatory mandates of the central elements. Having a more sensitive, heterogeneous and flexible character, it is the interface between the central system and the concrete reality. The nomination of these two systems, central and peripheral, allows the understanding of the social representations as a mechanism of socio-cognitive and affective adaptation.

As pointed out by Zanatta and Costa (2014), the social representations are cognitive-affective structures and cannot be reduced only to their cognitive content. The affective must also be present. Based on this, one can understand the social representations of the crack, developed by its users, as a collective interpretation of the reality experienced and spoken by this social group, directing behaviors, communications, subjectivity and affections. Thus, this study aimed to identify and analyze the content and structure of the crack social representation, elaborated by drug addicts under treatment.

Method

This is a non-experimental study, with emphasis on the qualitative approach. Our sample comprised 30 crack users under treatment, males, older than 18 years old, with education, income and marital status varied. This is a non-probabilistic sample, of accidental type. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were: a) be crack user under treatment, diagnosed by a psychiatrist at the institution in the category F19 / ICD10, checking from the patient's medical records the crack description as the drug of abuse which motivates the admission, and this criterion was used to ensure that the survey participants were in fact in a drug dependency condition, especially the crack; and b) be more than 18 years old. The exclusion criterion was the presence of psychiatric comorbidities, linked to other ICD10 factors.

After the tracking of the patient's medical records, the users who met the inclusion criteria in the sample were invited to participate in the study. Those who accepted were taken to a private room within the institution, where the instruments were applied by one of the researchers with each participant individually. Data were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The mean duration of the interviews was 30 minutes.

The study was conducted in a psychiatric institution in the city of João Pessoa - PB. This institution provides care for patients with severe mental disorders and multiple drug users, including crack.

Two instruments were used: the first was a semi-structured interview containing some questions prepared by the researchers themselves. However, for this study, the results regarding the guiding question "which means crack for you?" will be only described and analyzed by the Thematic Content Analysis. The second instrument used was the Free Word Association Technique, that consists in asking the subject to say the words or phrases that come to their mind at the moment an inducing stimulus given by the researcher appears, usually the verbal label designating the representational object (Nobrega & Coutinho, 2011). In this study, crack was used as the inducing stimulus.

Data from the Free Word Association Technique were analyzed using the computer program Ensemble de programmes permettant l'analyse des évocations - Evoc, which performs a lexicographical analysis, combining the frequency of the words and / or phrases transmission with the order in which they are evoked. The Evoc organizes the evoked words in quadrants, demonstrating graphically the words that belong to the core and to the peripheral system of the social representations. The graph presented by Evoc is called four place chart. This technique can account for the identification of the structure of a social representation.

This research meets the provisions of Resolution 196/96 of the Conselho Nacional de Saúde (National Health Council). It was duly approved by the Comissão de Ética em Pesquisa (Research Ethics Committee) from the Centro de Ciências da Saúde (Health Sciences Center) - CEP / CCS - of the Federal University of Paraíba, under the Protocol. 0235/11.

Results and Discussion

Next, we will present and discuss firstly the results arising from the Free Word Association Technique relating to the analysis of the crack social representation structure, then the results of the interviews from the Thematic Content will be analyzed. The Figure 1 contains the quadrant for the central system and the peripheral system.

Central Core			Next Peripheral System		
$f \geq 7$ AOE < 2.7			$f \geq 7$ AOE ≥ 2.7		
Evocations	f	AOE	Evocations	f	AOE
Destruction	14	2.00	Death	7	3.71
Sadness	8	2.62			
Next Peripheral System			Far Peripheral System		
$f < 7$ AOE < 2.7			$f < 7$ AOE ≥ 2.7		
Evocations	f	AOE	Evocations	f	AOE
Compulsion	4	2.25	Hallucination	4	3.75
Drug	5	1.00	Anguish	6	3.33
Loss	4	1.50	Despair	4	2.75
			Destroy the family	6	3.50
			There is no future	4	3.25

Figure 1. Quadrant of evocations about the crack stimulus: f = Frequency. AOE = Average Order Evocations.

The Figure 1 was constructed from the average frequency equal to, greater than or less than seven participants, in an average order of evocation around 2.7. In the upper left quadrant, we observe the evocations destruction and sadness, which probably corresponds to the core of the crack social representation which was built by its users. These terms are unifying and stabilizers elements of this representation, and determined by the historical and ideological conditions, and they are responsible for continuity, consistency and permanence of the representation (Abric, 2001b).

These elements, which form the core of the crack social representation, express the psychological distress that accompanies the subjective and social life of the investigated users. The term destruction may be referring to the harm that crack brings to the lives of its users, both in physical aspect, as in family, financial and social life. In addition, being the crack an illegal drug that causes dependence, it carries a negative charge that puts its users in a social exclusion condition, bringing suffering to the individual and his family.

In a study by Branco et al. (2012), it was also found the association of the meaning of the drugs to the term destruction, since the drugs were identified as co-responsible for the emotional, family and materials losses of their users. Furthermore, it was assigned to crack devastating, destructive, aggressive and compulsive effects. The perception of the drug as something connected to sadness,

anguish, depression and suffering was also found in other studies (Oliveira, McCallum & Costa, 2010; Santos, Acioli & Sousa, 2012).

In this regard, it is highlighted the affective dimension of the crack social representation, where this drug is linked to negative feelings. For Campos and Rouquette (2003), the affective dimension of social representation is important, as it influences, sometimes organizes or determines cognitions or evaluative behaviors. Accordingly, from the time that the individuals produce an assessment of the representational object or any of its elements, an affective dimension is activated. Thus, it can be said that the core elements of the crack social representation, heavily laden with negative emotions, dictate the rules in relation to this social object, whereas, according to Abric (2001b), the central system is essentially normative.

In the intermediate peripheral system of the crack social representation system is the evocation death. This term may refer both to the physical death, as death in the subjective sense, since the crack is identified as a drug that kills dreams, relationships, dignity and autonomy, bringing many losses. The association between drugs and death was also found in the study by Santos et al. (2012), about the crack social representations in the State of Pernambuco press. In this study, it was found that the papers emphasize the concept of death linked to drug dependency.

Hence, one can see that this representational element is widely shared in the society, transmitted mainly by the media, which often features a sensational, alarmist speech and for purposes of generating controversy (Romanini & Roso, 2012). This discourse is assumed and played by the users, who cannot see any recovery hopes, but, just one possible way: death. As Ronzani et al. (2014), this representation is also part of the health services where professionals do not often have motivation to develop strategies for prevention and treatment because they believe that users will not be able to stop using drugs and, therefore, they tend to move away from them.

In the bottom left quadrant, even in the intermediate peripheral system, the evoked words were compulsion, drug and loss. In contrast to the core, the far peripheral system, shown in the lower right quadrant the evoked words were hallucinations, anguish, despair, destroys the family and there is no future. According to Abric (2001a), these elements act as the interface between the central system and the concrete reality.

The terms compulsion and hallucination refers to the physical effects on the condition that the dependence of the crack use brings. Such terms, as well as the anxiety component, also have a technical meaning, own of medical science. This was also found in the study by Branco et al. (2012). Thus, the appropriation of scientific medical discourse is observed, which produces, along with the common sense, the crack social representations, which are also influenced by the place of insertion of these individuals, who were placed in a psychiatric institution.

Finally, the evocation drug may signal the objectification of crack in its scientific definition. The element there is no future, located in the far peripheral system, puts the social representation of the objectified crack in a temporal perspective, as something negative that paralyzes the subject in his subjective experience suffered.

With a view to further deepening in the understanding of the crack social representation for drug addicts under treatment, it will be analyzed below the interview results with regard to the question "which means crack to you?" through the Thematic Content Analysis, using simple frequencies (f) and percentages.

It was observed that the crack is represented by the following: destruction with 83% of the units of analysis (f= 142); curse with 12% (f = 21); and illusion, which was 5% of the units of analysis (f = 9).

The subcategory destruction understands the concepts that they assign the crack to the destruction. Ex.: *"Greater destruction of the world"; "It's destructive"; "Crack means destruction."* The subcategory curse understands the concepts that highlight the crack as something evil, with demonic connotations. Ex.: *"I consider the crack as the demon in the form of drug."* Once the crack is represented as something connected to the Devil and that has the power to destroy, we observed a personification of this drug. The crack is represented as a being, as something that has its own life, as something that can "come", "kill", "steal" and "destroy", with a lively and not inanimate nature, as can be seen in the following reports: *"Crack came to kill, to steal and to destroy"* (E 02); *"That (the crack) to me is the devil, is the enemy is the devil, I think this drug came just to kill"* (E 26); *"Crack is Satan to*

me, is the devil in my life and in the life of anyone"(E 30). The subcategory illusion understands the concepts referred to crack as something that provides a fanciful pleasure. Ex.: "*Illusion that we search and that has no meaning*"; "*Fantasy*".

Through these data, there was the inseparable relationship between the destruction element, where is at the core of the crack social representation, and the curse, which denote the idea that the crack is something connected to the Devil and that he, the Devil or the crack, is responsible for the destruction of the user's life and the society. Crack is also represented as an illusion, as something that provides a fanciful pleasure, culminating in the destruction of the individual life.

This issue was also found in the study conducted by Romanini and Roso (2012), in which it was found that the crack is propagated in the media as a being, as something that has its own life and that invades the homes to destroy families, being the subject of the actions while the user is its object. Expressions, such as: a drug that enslaves in seconds, that mocks the hopes of recovery, which erodes families, which kills more than any other drug and that sinks the dependent on the moral degradation and crime, are said.

This crack representation anchored in something diabolical was historically constructed, because since the Middle Ages the use of drugs has been condemned by the church, as well as the excessive use of the legal drugs. Being the anchoring, as Moscovici (2011), a mechanism that tries to anchor strange ideas, reducing them to the common categories and images, placing them in a family context, it is noted that this aspect of the drug malignancy is anchored in the religious knowledge, which associates the drugs to the devil.

The representation of the drug linked to the devil figure approaches that object to the daily lives of the individuals, linking it to a common and well-known figure. This refers to the process of objectification, in which the individuals materialize, give form and aim the drug to better understand it. This issue reflects the naturalization phenomenon, characteristic of social representations, in which there is a tendency of the natural thought to reify the notions (Moscovici, 2011). In this sense, the negative effects attributed to crack acquire concreteness through the devil figure, being targeted by the terms destruction, curse and illusion.

This representation points to a user passivization, as he settles of this discourse, he puts himself in a victim position and not responsible for his acts, since he is dominated by the nefarious drug, which has the power to destroy. This can be shown in the following speech: "*A drug addict is a poor sufferer, a poor victim of Satan, the real devil*"(E 30). Therefore, this representation of the drugs as something evil serves to explain and to predict the actions of the users, and it also justifies their conduct. According to Moscovici (2011), one of the functions of the social representation is to justify the behavior and the conduct before the social group.

This representation also gives rise to what Pérez-Nebra and Jesus (2011) call as self-fulfilling prophecies, in which the beliefs that people have affect the behaviors increasing the chances of experiencing what one believes or fears. Thus, these speeches end up legitimizing the behavior of abuse, "*since I am overwhelmed by the devil himself, I am going to live under this condition*." It is observed that this way of talking by the users involves a number of implications, since such representations earn real status, guiding the conduct of these individuals as part of their identity and affecting the understanding that they build about the reality. This negative perception of themselves can damage the self-image of these users, affecting their self-esteem and their capacity of coping the drugs, complicating the treatment success.

In addition, the crack representation as an evil being favors the perception of this drug as a common social enemy, against which the society must fight. While recognizing that the crack is a major social problem in which the society as a whole needs to be engaged in finding solutions, this representation does not provide a crack vision as something inanimate, which depends on the use the man makes. He is presented as if it had life and was looking for young people to infect them, like a virus, not wanting to leave their bodies anymore. As stated by Oliveira (2009), even being a lifeless stone the crack became the social enemy to be fought.

The personification of the crack as an enemy being favors the idea that it is the guilty for everything bad, having the power to destroy the lives of those who uses it and the society, as can be exemplified in the following report: "*It is a drug that destroys the person physically and morally. It*

destroys the home, it destroys everything ... for me, the crack is simply a quickly and easily devastation" (E 09); *"It is the total destruction of the humanity, to those who experience it"* (E 15).

Essa ideia das drogas serem culpadas por tudo de ruim, também foi constatada no estudo realizado por Oliveira et al. (2010). Os resultados mostraram que os agentes comunitários de saúde representaram as drogas como ligadas à condição de pobreza, desestruturação familiar e violência que assolam a sociedade.

This idea of drugs being blamed for everything bad, was also observed in the study by Oliveira et al. (2010). The results showed that the community health workers represent the drugs as linked to poverty, to family breakdown and to the violence which plagues the society.

However, the analysis of the crack social representations allows us to say that this substance has been more identified as a cause of the social problems than as a consequence, being disregarded several factors involved in the social problems. In the words of Bucher and Oliveira (1994), these representations blame the drug users for the problems of the society, making them "scapegoats", because they are considered as the causers and responsible for them.

To the extent that focuses crack as an evil being, blamed for everything bad that happens in the society, there is a persistent of a moral evaluation that perceives it as an external evil to the society (Mota, 2009). Focusing on crack, the social problems that allowed it to have guaranteed entry in Brazilian society, and had the impact it has today is forgotten, being one of the most serious social problems nowadays. One forgets problems that are structural, such as poverty and the social inequality, as well as the other mishaps of contemporaneity. Therefore, the representation of the drug as the guilty for everything bad focuses on drugs and hides the inefficiency of the state in ensuring the basic rights to citizens, exempting the government. This point is of great importance, since it is known that the provision of decent quality for a living can generate innumerable benefits for the population, contributing to the alleviation of the social problems, including the abuse of drugs.

Finally, as stated by Crives and Dimenstein (2003), the problem of drug use and its ways of coping should be analyzed from the various expressions of inequalities in the society, which are historically produced. Such inequalities produce various forms of suffering and exclusion that affect the quality of life, including with regard to the health-disease. This situation requires interventions that go beyond the only therapeutic individualized nature of practices, requiring collective action, from the political-institutional side, with a view to build the citizenship and the search for quality of life.

Final Thoughts

Given the importance of the debate about addiction today, this study aimed to identify and analyze the content and structure of the crack social representation, developed by drug addicts under treatment. The results showed a negative crack representation, in which it is embodied in the figure of the Devil, having the power to destroy the lives of its users and the society in general. It was found that this representation is composed of elements that show the sadness and the suffering that permeate the drug user reality. This crack view favors a sensationalist and alarmist approach to the issue, in which its users become enemies of the society, their antagonists.

The belief in the dominating power of the crack, where it is perceived as something that overwhelms the individual entirely, removes the autonomy of the subject, making him passive and helpless in the face of the addiction. These views certainly have an impact in confronting the use of drugs, and hinder the assimilation of the harm reduction policy for users, prevailing the influence of the hegemonic medical discourse, which advocates the abstinence as the only possibility for this subject.

In a way, the social representations found in this study, which are hegemonic, justify practices such as the compulsory hospitalization. This is because the user is considered helpless before the drug, and also for being a socially dangerous or sick individual, requiring thus a State supervision. In this sense, one can see that for the realization of a committed work with the subject in his plurality, it is necessary to undress the prejudices and stigmas rooted in the social fabric, to take a more focused look at the subjectivities and less for blaming the subject, minimizing the social exclusion.

Given the above, there is a need to change these social representations, with dispelling the myth that the drug user is a being linked to evil and with the recognition of him as a person, a citizen with rights, duties and needs. Public policies that have the emphasis on prevention and treatment of the drug abuse, as well as public policies that promote housing, leisure, education and vocational formation and harm reduction are very important. It is also necessary that there be reflections about chemical dependency, from the understanding of the society as a whole, from the position where the drug user is located in this society, and the role that drugs play in it, aiming to examine and a multidimensional approach of this complex phenomenon.

Although the contributions of this study, its results cannot be generalized to the entire population of crack users, since it aimed at deepening of the representations of a specific portion of participants. In addition, this research was conducted only with men of a health care facility that cares the most disadvantaged sections of the population. Thus, it is important to carry out further studies to check that the results remain in women or members of other social classes who are also crack users.

Finally, it is highlighted that, given the complexity and magnitude of the phenomenon of drugs in the society, this study was punctual, not intended to exhaust this thematic area. However, it is believed that the results of this study have important implications and may contribute to the development of more effective strategies to combat drug abuse. It can even serve as support for programs including not only the promotion and treatment, but also drug prevention.

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Received: May 28, 2014
Approved: Mar. 2, 2015

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