



The Perception of Drug Users About Their Human Rights



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ABSTRACT

The objective was to understand how illegal drug users monitored at a psychosocial care center for alcohol and drug users perceive and experience their human rights. The data were collected through semistructured interviews with 17 users and analyzed through content analysis. The results demonstrated the difficulty the users perceive to express what their human rights are, as if rights were something extraneous to their own life, particularly in function of the prejudice and stigma related to illegal drugs use in Brazil.

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Concerns with the protection of human rights have substantially increased since the French Revolution, gaining undeniably important dimensions in the international context and inside countries. Among the human rights, health stands out as a social right. According to the World Health Organization, health represents a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 1946). Therefore, the right to health is fundamental for the exercise of civil and political and collective rights. Hence, enjoying the best possible state of health is one of the fundamental rights of any human being (Bustreo & Doebbler, 2010; Fitchett, 2011; Ventura et al., 2009).

In Brazil, the right to health was consolidated in the 1988 Federal Constitution (Meier & Fox, 2010). Consequently, the Unified Health System (SUS), established in 1990, is based on the principles of universal, public and free access to health actions and services; on comprehensive actions, taking care of the individual as a whole; on equity, being the duty to equally attend to each person's rights, respecting individual differences; on the decentralization of health resources and on the social control exercised by Municipal, State and National Health Councils and Health Conferences (Brazil, 1988).

The protection of human rights is intrinsically related to the guarantee of all individuals' health, especially of stigmatized and vulnerable populations, such as drug users. In this context, drug use can be considered a severe influence on people's health, with very relevant social consequences, including the possible interference in the users' exercise of their rights.

Therefore, at the end of the 1980s, the Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS) were created. Then, in 2002, Decree GM 336 established the

different modalities of the CAPS, including the CAPSad, for people who abuse alcohol and other drugs. The CAPSad were implemented to permit therapeutic planning based on an individual perspective of continuous evolution, permitting early interventions and aiming to limit the stigma associated with treatment. Care delivery for drug users in the country is guided by the National Drugs Policy (Brazil, 2004), influenced by global guidelines, initially focused on prohibition, through the strengthening of the control and international repression system and, today, tending towards flexibility with a view to users' recovery and social reinsertion, explicitly distinguishing between illegal drug users and traffickers (Uchoa, 2004).

Illegal drug users figure among the most marginalized populations in the majority of countries. It can be affirmed that a large part of the problems related to drug use derives from an incomplete and partial understanding of the actions, effects and consequences of the drugs by society in general, by the health professionals responsible for care delivery to drug users and by the users themselves (Ventura, Mendes, Trevizan, & Rodrigues, 2013). In that context, the general objective in this qualitative study was to understand how illegal drug users monitored at a CAPSad located in an interior city in the State of São Paulo, Brazil, perceive what their human rights are, what they think of health as a right and how they exercise their right to health.

As a stigmatized population, it is fundamental to identify the illegal drug users' perception of their rights. These study results can offer health services and their professionals' relevant information about possibilities to provide care that allows the drug users to exercise their human rights more effectively.

METHOD

A descriptive research with a qualitative approach was undertaken, which is aimed at interpreting the meanings illegal drug users attribute to their human rights. The data were collected through semistructured

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interviews with drug users monitored at a CAPSad in an interior city in São Paulo. This technique was chosen because it explores a theme based on the search for the informants' information, which the interviewer analyzes and presents in a structured manner (Duarte, 2005). The interviews were held based on a guiding script with questions that address the meanings the drug users attribute to their human rights and the right to health, as well as to the exercise of their right. Participants were illegal drug users monitored by the only CAPSad in an interior city in São Paulo. With respect to their recruitment, three health professionals from CAPSad indicated among all their clients at the time of data collection, the patients who possessed the necessary cognitive conditions to participate in the study. All indicated patients were invited, and all of them accepted to serve as subjects in this research. They voluntarily gave their written consent, accepting to participate after being informed about the research.

The research received approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing (Protocol 1222/2010), and after the participants had given their free and informed consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. In this context, it is highlighted that the excerpts cited in the results are indicated using fictitious names for the research participants.

To analyze the data, the thematic content analysis technique was applied (Bardin, 1995). The categories were constructed as the themes emerged from the text. The exploration of the material consisted of three phases, in which all the authors of this study participated: pre-analysis, in which the data were transcribed and organized by each researcher separately; exploration, in which the data were organized in thematic categories by each researcher separately. After the first coding, researchers compared results that were independently derived, cross-checked codes, and refined the core themes repeatedly until they had a consensus on the final categories and core themes. Finally, treatment and interpretation of the results were based on the literature that constitutes the reference framework of human rights and the right to health.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

About the Research Subjects

Seventeen users of illegal drugs who attend the CAPSad health service for treatment participated in the research. Most research subjects are men (94.11%), single (88.23%), between 19 and 28 years of age (52.94%) and who had at most a primary education (58.81%). Among them, 52.94% are under treatment for crack, 29.41% for cocaine and 17.64% for marijuana consumption. Most participants had used drugs for between 3 and 7 years (52.94%). Some subjects had used drugs for a period ranging between nine and 13 years (23.52%), others between 14 and 15 years (11.56%), one for 30 years (5.88%) and another for 3 months (5.88%). Among the interviewees who declared their profession, only 29.41% are currently exercising their profession, 52.94% are unemployed and the remaining 17.64% on leave. Table 1 displays details about the study participants' sociodemographic characteristics.

About the Thematic Categories and Units

About the drug users' perception of the human rights concept, the following themes were obtained: "What are human rights?", "Right and life within society"; and "Right of drugs users versus rights of 'normal' people".

With respect to the view of health as a human right, the following themes were found: "Health as a right and the fundamental role of the CAPSad"; "Excessive formalization of the right to health" and "Information as a premise to exercise the right to health". Concerning the users' exercise of the right to health, the theme "Drug as disease and gaps in the exercise of rights by drugs users" was found.

Fig. 1 summarizes the thematic categories and units resulting from the data analysis.

Table 1

Characteristics of Drug Users Interviewed According to Gender, Marital Status, Age, Education and Profession.

Characteristics	No	%
Female	1	5.88
Male	16	94.11
Marital status		
Single	15	88.23
Married	1	5.88
Divorced	1	5.88
Age		
19–28	9	52.94
34–41	6	35.29
50–53	2	11.76
Education		
Unfinished primary	7	41.17
Finished primary	3	17.64
Unfinished secondary	2	11.76
Finished secondary	5	29.41
Profession		
Construction assistant	1	5.88
Service aid	2	11.76
Shop assistant	1	5.88
Merchant	1	5.88
Sewer	1	5.88
Beverage deliverer	1	5.88
Mechanic	1	5.88
Metal worker	1	5.88
Motorcycle taxi-driver	2	11.76
Baker	1	5.88
Lathe operator	1	5.88
Guard	2	11.76
No profession	2	11.76

Source: Interviews held at the Psychosocial Care Center Alcohol and Drugs (CAPSad).

"What Are Human Rights?"

When they were asked about the meaning of human rights, most participants were unable to define them. Some explicitly demonstrated this difficulty, while others answered but were unable to conceptualize what human rights are.

[...]Oh dear....I couldn't tell [...] (Alan).

[...]Right to be aware of the cause [...] (Silvio).

The above statements reveal the subjects' difficulty to express what their rights are, as the view of a subject with rights is distant from these users' reality. The gaps in the understanding of human rights were also evidenced in a public opinion poll developed by the Human Rights Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic and published in 2010, aimed at discovering what human rights mean for Brazilian citizens (Venturi, 2010). In this perspective, a large part of the Brazilian are unaware that they are holders of rights and that the law is a socially constructed process, which goes far beyond the existence of laws and the monopoly of the state (Ventura, Mello, Andrade, & Mendes, 2012). Hence, in order to implement a new human rights culture in the country, it is fundamental to reflect about means to guarantee their practice. This lack of awareness about rights can lead to a loss of meaning of the results of important fights to put them in practice, in the international as well as the Brazilian context, with a consequent danger of social regressions provoked by the population's disenchantment. Therefore, a concrete interpretation of human rights should be aimed for, to the detriment of abstract legal conceptions that are distant from people's reality.

Right and Life Within Society

Also regarding the meaning of human rights, some interviewees were able to relate it with the actual meaning of right as a condition for people to live in society.

[...]Right is something inherent in the social condition of existing as a person [...] (Fernando).

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