

Imaginary of female prisoners about the phenomenon of drugs

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Received: 07/14/2014.

Accepted: 10/01/2015.

Published: 03/31/2016.

Suggested citation:

Oliveira JF, Rodrigues AS, Porcino CA, Reale MJOU. Imaginary of female prisoners about the phenomenon of drugs. Rev. Eletr. Enf. [Internet]. 2016 [cited ___/___/___];18:e1154. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5216/ree.v18.31072>.

ABSTRACT

The involvement with drugs constitutes a main cause of women imprisonment and it is related to gender issues. A qualitative research aimed at knowing the imaginary of female prisoners about drugs. Twenty-six prisoners were investigated and projective technique of drawing-story was applied with the theme, and its analysis was grounded on the Theory of Social Representations. Elements of social representations found on drawings and story contents, permeated with realisms, showed psychic suffering and aggressiveness, objectified and anchored on participants' affective, behavioral and psychosocial dimensions. Imprisonment makes evident the lowering of esteem, retraction and isolation signaled as motives for involvement with psychoactive substances in a trial of social recognition and overcoming of affective needs. It is concluded that participant's imaginary of drugs elucidates subjectivities of female role in a cross-sectional phenomenon in the society, and its acknowledgement for women's health practices is pertinent.

Descriptors: Street Drugs; Substance-Related Disorders; Women's Health; Community Health Nursing.

INTRODUCTION

The drugs phenomenon affects all people from different societies, varying in accordance to culture, values and predominant stereotypes for each social group. The female population is historically susceptible to social and gender inequalities, they have been considered a vulnerable group for consumption and participation in drug trafficking considering the changes in lifestyle permeated by gender issues in a

transversality with diverse variables, for example, race/color/ethnicity, class and generation⁽¹⁾.

The female participation in use, possession, traffic and distribution of drugs, directly or indirectly, is pointed as one of the responsible aspects for the increase of female imprisonment on the last decades, generally as an alternative path to guarantee family financial stability in undeserved social contexts⁽²⁾.

National epidemiological data reveal an increase in female drug consumption, as well as the growth in the number of imprisoned women due to drug involvement in the Brazilian territory⁽³⁻⁴⁾. Studies about Brazilian women in imprisonment situation reveal that most are young, single, with low education levels and low monthly family income^(2,5-6). In addition, the scientific literature points female participation in criminality as influencing the sociocultural environment surrounding women^(2,6-7).

In this sense, the ascendance of women involved with drugs is considered linked to subordination and obedience to men⁽⁸⁾, reproducing historically built elements of social inequalities for women. However, it is important to consider that power and status that some women acquire from drug trafficking, as a possibility, although transitory and relative, to exit their invisibility is characteristic of their trajectories⁽⁹⁾.

The increase in the number of women consuming and participating in drug trafficking is a theme constantly addressed in the media, being pertinent of scientific production about this issue, overall in what respects imprisoned women. Women imprisonment is a polemic action that produces discussions and challenges for governors, political leaders and health professionals, especially when linked to drug trafficking, because it involves two social actions and culturally not conceived for women and, legally, convicted for men and women.

When considering the individual, the collective imaginary, and the imaginary of this reality practice of women that refers to social representations (SR), which are linked to values, thoughts and practices that guide individual behavior in social relationships, they are expressed through stereotypes, subjectivities, actions, and communications within people⁽¹⁰⁾.

In this sense, the study objective was to know the imaginary of imprisoned women about drugs. The presented data has relevance and originality due to the social group and the adopted technique to produce data. Its dissemination aims to contribute with the production of knowledge about drugs and female population, trying to provide subsidies to comprehend subjective elements that permeates the social imaginary of imprisoned women of their involvement with drugs.

METHODS

The presented data constitutes a cut of a qualitative study, grounded on the Theory of Social Representations. The SR focus on how human beings comprehend things surrounding them, allowing comprehension and communication of the subject in the world, and creating common sense theories from their experiences⁽¹⁰⁾.

The study was developed in a female institution of the Penitentiary Complex of a Northeast capital city in Brazil that guards women by provisional measures and convicted in court, complying imprisonment

regiments with custodial sentences in closed, semi-open and open regimens. It has a staff composed by: correctional officers, administrative, and health employees. The health staff was composed by: a nurse, two nursing technicians, one gynecologist physician, a dental surgeon, two psychologists, and three social workers.

During the study, the Institution had 152 inmates. From those, 92 were arrested by the article 33, of the Law nº 11.343, from August 23rd of 2006, related to drug issues.

The selection of participants was conducted by previously established inclusion criteria: to be arrested due to drugs involvement, and to be in apparent physical and mental state able to answer the instrument of data production. Facing such criteria and common interurrences from the prison context, as employee's strikes, rebellions, and justice task efforts, 26 women participated in the study.

The data collection occurred during August to October of 2011, in previously scheduled days and times by unit directors, meeting the institutional norms and routines. The access to participants was given by intervention/indication of health professionals from the penitentiary complex.

For data production, we used drawing-story (D.S) as theme. It is a projective technique from clinical psychology that stimulates dialogue and apprehension of latent content, by thematic and graphic projection. Its application, besides the possibility of apprehension of subjectivities experienced in the relational context in its multiple facets, allows expression of statements linked to actual facts and events⁽¹¹⁾.

To use the technique, it was offered to participants the following materials: white office paper, a box with coloring pencils, pens and black pencil. After explaining the technique, the guiding question was presented: "What drug represents to you?". None participant presented resistance to develop the procedure. The story was read by each participant with explanation for the drawing.

The following steps were used for material analysis: a) systematic observation of drawings; b) selection of drawings by graphic similarity and/or approximation of themes; c) fluctuating readings of stories' thematic units; and d) graphics analysis and interpretation⁽¹¹⁾.

The study was approved by the Ethics in Research Committee from the Nursing School at Universidade Federal da Bahia (EEUFBA), in April 25th of 2011, protocol nº 10/2011 (CONEP - FR 404426). To guarantee anonymity of participants, they were asked to indicate a pseudonym adopted for identification throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The SR dynamics is linked to social groups that elaborate and use it, in this context it becomes relevant to characterize the investigated group, besides presenting the results obtained by the application and analysis of the drawing-story.

In a trial for better visualization of stories elaborated by participants, the selected D.S. were those that made more evident the imaginary of participants, and the stories followed by identification data were entered besides the drawing.

The investigated women were between 18 to 49 years, and the predominant age group was 20 to 29 years. Most of them had incomplete elementary school education, income lower than one minimum wage (MW), self-identified as mixed or black color, catholic, from Salvador city and metropolitan region, living in owned houses and/or provided by family members before arrestment. The literature also points these inmates as young black women, family heads, with low education, with precarious socioeconomic conditions and, having an average of two young children⁽²⁾.

Regarding criminal aspects, most were primary defendant and they were in closed regimen. From all interviewed, more than half were in temporary situation, waiting for their trial, sentence and/or transference to other prisons. The ones who were convicted had penalties varying between 5 to 18 years of imprisonment. Imprisonment is a condition that broadens social and health impacts for women involved with drugs.

In the analysis, the graphic symbols and story contents allowed to identify aspects of affective, behavioral and psychosocial dimensions of participants, from those emerged two categories that guide the comprehension of participant's productions – drugs: destruction of affective bonds and death as drug social representation.

Drugs: destruction of affective bonds

From the analysis of drawing-stories with themes, we identified the representation of elements similar to their themes, anchored in their psycho-affective spheres, with signals of emotional involvement that revealed feelings related to drugs, as: sadness, fear, insecurity, and suffering. These feelings appear related to the rupture of affective bonds caused by the involvement with drugs.

In the D.S from Chart 1, the elements house and people appear central and allow us to infer that for participants, the destruction is related to family and social context. The house and people have clashing sizes and are in different levels, promoting a perception of distance between home and the characters drawn. This idea is reinforced by textual productions, where the withdraw from the family is treated as a central theme, being represented as a destruction permeated by a sadness feeling⁽¹²⁾.





Chart 1: Graphics and stories 8 and 25. Salvador, BA, Brazil, 2011.

	<p>D.S. 08</p> <p><i>A son and a husband</i></p> <p><i>The drug is a home destruction. I feel myself very sad for having a home and a family destroyed because of this drug.</i></p> <p>Authorship: Déa, 28 years, stable relationship, 1 child, complete elementary school, living in a rented house, income lower than one MW. <i>Um filho e um marido</i></p>
	<p>D.S. 21</p> <p><i>Me crying today</i></p> <p><i>Everything started when a friend told me - China, why don't you take 50g of rock that costs R\$ 1,000.00 you make R\$ 2,000.00. A thousand is yours and one thousand is the payment. With the new one thousand you take 25g and puts your own rules. Then I did it! After that, I took 50g of powder and I packaged it, and started to sell it at Barradão with beer and from then on. Today I feel very sad because I'm not close to my children, doing activities that we used to do and specially to kiss them good night and to take them to school.</i></p> <p>Authorship: China, 30 years, single, 03 children, lived in an owned house, street vendor, income inferior to one MW, family head.</p>

When the woman is arrested, she is isolated from outside and with that, family bonds are under pressure, favoring loss of contact and rupture of relationships. The life in prison requires constant adaptations caused by experiences promoted by an life marked by institutional rules organized to attend a priority of male demands, besides the loss of basic rights as maternity and family relationships⁽²⁾. This isolation can bring impact for women’s mental health, as well as, to be harmful for future re-adaptation of participants in social conviviality. However, it should be considered that freedom privation situation itself, and tensions, fears, anguish experienced in their routine, reflects on expression possibilities.

In the presented D.S in Chart 2, we observe that pictorial similarities, as well as thematic, directs the social representation of drugs to destruction of people and family. However, this destruction is not related to finitude.

Chart 2: Graphics and stories 03, 12, 13 and 26. Salvador, BA, Brazil, 2011.

	<p style="text-align: center;">D.S. 03</p> <p><i>Drug lead to destruction.</i></p> <p>The story starts with me happy at my house. It was Christmas month, my children were happy when the police knocked at my door and asked about my son that lived upstairs. I said, I didn't know. He went up my son's stairs and he took a long time. My 14-year old daughter-in-law was there alone and I asked to call her family. I went. When I returned the cop was with the drug in his hands saying that it was from my son. He took me with my 14-year-old daughter-in-law to the police station. There, he released my daughter-in-law and brought me to the 9th police station and after to the prison. After that, there was destruction in my house, there was separation from my children and I'm here until today.</p> <p>Authorship: Rose, 45 years, proceeding from SSA, single, educated until the 4th grade of elementary school, mother of 9 children, lives in owned house and assumes the head of the family function, has a family income lower than one MW.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">D.S. 12</p> <p><i>Say no to drugs</i></p> <p>The person deals with drugs. She uses her own house to keep drugs to sell. One day, she took the car to transport drug from one city to another. In the middle of the way she was stopped at a police check point and the police found the drug and the person was arrested and stayed without the house and the car.</p> <p>Authorship: Pera, a young women of 19 years, incomplete elementary school, stable relationship, student, with an income lower than one MW.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">D.S. 13</p> <p><i>Street boy</i></p> <p>The drug represents suffering to many families. The drug came to kill, to steal and to destruct. The society is suffering because of the drug. The drug represents suffering to me and to many. It has to stop. The end.</p> <p>Authorship: Negona, 20 years, complete elementary school, single, one son, family income lower than one MW.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">D.S. 26</p> <p><i>The suffering family</i></p> <p>Once there was a very poor family that had 02 boys and the mother worked in other people's kitchen, and the mother did not have anything to give to her children, and then, she got involved with trafficking. The mother suffered so much and they were getting even more involved. One of the boys got shot in the shooting exchange with the police, and the other boy saw everything and left the traffic and took care of his brother, but the mom cried and the boy found a job to help the mom and he started to work and was happy forever after.</p> <p>Authorship: Diu, 49 years, complete elementary school, stable relationship, autonomous, 02 children, family income higher than one MW.</p>

In this dimension, the destruction is anchored to the physical and psycho-affective sphere, that is, the fact of them being separated from their family marks the physical dimension and, on the other hand, the freedom privation significantly impacts in the psycho-affective sphere.

This perspective is well represented in the D.S. 3, where the house and the person draw were scratched at the end of the production by the participant as a sign of destruction. In addition, the house was draw without indication of doors or windows, that would allow contact between the person's internal world (the interior of the house) and the external world (the environment), that can express the distance of interpersonal relationships and introspection. The human figure and the house are drawn outside of the circle identified as world, strengthening the perception of withdraw, once the world is seen closed, limited by a continuous line, not having any sign of integration between the subject and the environment.

Besides, graphics produced only in brown color in the D.S 3 denotes insecurity, inhibition and repression. This is the favorite color of passive, indifferent, rule observers and insecure people⁽¹²⁾.

In general, in graphics and story contents, we observed elements translating the idea of destruction caused by the woman's involvement with drugs. This idea is permeated by the actual imprisonment condition in which they are in, referring drugs as the motive for such situation. Besides, the destruction is characterized by family withdraw and losses of material goods, many acquired through drug trafficking.

The graphics 12, 13 and 26 clearly show how this phenomenon impacted the participant's life and the similarities with situations experienced that culminated in the freedom privation. In the D.S 12, the destruction is related to loss of material goods and distance from children that generate psychic suffering.

In the drawing 13, a female figure accompanied by a child is portrayed with a suffering expression and it does not have physical contact. The drawing is simple, done only with black pencil, without many details, which can suggest difficulty of the participant to get in contact with the theme, probably due to the suffering caused, as portrayed in the story. Besides, the presence of the sole line in the human figure demonstrates preoccupation with the reality and the need to know where she is stepping – once it is not essential to the drawing structure. The open smile – considered a semantical production – denotes forced sympathy, inadequate affection⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾.

The drawing 26 is portrayed by means of a female figure crying, and another figure of black color that is similar to a gun. The drawing trace was done with low pressure, denoting low level of energy, apathy, timidity, insecurity, lack of trust in herself, fear, inadequacy feelings and, in few cases, impulse repression⁽¹²⁾. In the thematic production, it is observed the sadness feeling across the whole story.



The drawing-story of participants revealed objective ideas anchored in before and after prison experiences, attributing to drugs the SR of destruction object and death. In this case, the social representation does not only meets the function related to familiarization with the object, but also the familiarity with the group pertaining in what related to the affective dimension ruled by the experience and expertise allowed by situational contingency. In the words of Moscovici "[...] *the social representations incite to worry us even more with the imaginary and symbolic conducts in the common existence of collectivities*"⁽¹⁴⁾.

Death as Drug Social Representation

When considering the D.S 5 and 19 (Chart 3), we observe significant similarities in graphic expressions

as well as in the thematic contents of stories. From the respective productions, it is possible to infer that death for the investigated group is anchored in physical and psychic dimensions, objectified through the coffin figure, expressed in the drawing 5, and in the image of a cross, accompanied of ghost figures with sadness faces and by the presence of tears in the drawing 19.

Chart 3: Graphics and stories 05 and 19. Salvador, BA, Brazil, 2011.

	<p style="text-align: right;">D.S. 05</p> <p><i>Drug: the end of everything</i></p> <p><i>This story starts with a young girl that gets involved with the wrong guy and ended up having acts that she cannot turn back. She did not have the luck that many had. Many goes to jail, but she ended up losing life without the right of a second chance. I hope that who is seeing this little story does not commit the same error as this young girl. I've committed, but I'm not dead. I'm in jail far away from my children and my family. It isn't death, but still, it isn't good. But, I thank God every day for being alive and not dead as this girl.</i></p> <p>Authorship: Rebeca (D.S. 05), 26 years, incomplete elementary school, stable relationship, 02 children, income lower than one MW.</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">D.S. 19</p> <p><i>Do not use drugs nor traffic</i></p> <p><i>This man is dead. Do not use drugs, it kills. Who never tried, don't try it. It only takes you two ways: jail or death.</i></p> <p>Authorship: Mili, 19 years, complete elementary school, single, 02 children, family income lower than one MW.</p>



The coffin that appears in D.S 5 makes a direct reference to death, attributing to drugs the responsibility of the end of life. The human figure drawn within the coffin, covered by red flowers, refers to the burial. The red color from flowers in the coffin reinforces the presence of emotional issues linked to the situation of loss or the grief process. And, because the red is considered a fundamental symbol of the life principle in function of its association with blood, it is possible to note that questions related to a loss situation is part of a remote past. In this aspect, the written production corroborates with this interpretation.

In the graphic 19, the drawing line demonstrates pressure and the absence of hands and fingers, configuring an amputation, revealing repressed aggressive impulses. Death is represented by a red cross, allowing inference that it is a loss situation of a dear person and the red make us think that it is a physical and psychic intense suffering. The presence of a female figure besides this cross, in red tears reiterates even more the intense level of experienced suffering. A fact observed through the written production.

Besides this death projection for the drug social representation by inmates, the bars used in the drawings 11 and 15 denote freedom privation and represents a type of participants' death. In these drawing-stories, we note black color predominance, denoting sadness, anxiety, fear, retraction and maladjustment to

the place where they are. The size of ghost figures in the graphic shows low self-esteem linked to the perception of not being part of that context, although the reality is another.

Chart 4: Graphics and stories 11 and 15. Salvador, BA, Brazil, 2011.

	<p style="text-align: right;">D.S. 11</p> <p><i>A path of choice</i></p> <p><i>Maria was seduced by the drug world, she lost everything she had, she was arrested and she was given the opportunity to go back to her home, to the bosom of her family, and to search for spiritual help in her community church. But, in case she did not get the right path, it was death. Because, the drug is nothing more than a path that if the opportunity given is not taken, it leads to death.</i></p> <p>Authorship: Sister Cleide, 29 years, white, single, incomplete elementary school, lady of the house, primary defendant, income lower than 01 MW.</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">D.S. 15</p> <p><i>Life necessity</i></p> <p><i>Due to necessity, I rented my home to a drug dealer and after I've decided to sell drug, because I knew how to make rocks, I was known as "Powder Lili" and hunger took me here. I was arrested with 17 kg of base paste and I took 18 years and 09 months. This story ends here.</i></p> <p>Authorship: Lili, 41 years, incomplete elementary school, stable relationship, 03 children, family income lower than 01 MW.</p>

It should be punctuated that we did not give privilege to global descriptions nor to surveys contemplating the personality dynamics. In contrary, we prioritized the determination of relevant points, in consonance with the study problematic⁽¹⁵⁾. About the unconscious similarities, there is a possibility to determine the unconscious characteristics from these groupings through the D.S. projective technique to components of respective pertaining groups. After all, the common unconscious aspects tends to be highlighted, in case we take as subjects people that experience the same problems⁽¹⁵⁾.

The respective dimensioned representations figured in graphics productions permeated of realisms, denoting an elevated load of psychic suffering and aggressiveness. Besides, there is evidence of esteem lowering, retreat and isolation, suggestive of depressive humor caused by adjustment to freedom privation, a situation that generates impact not only on the family cycle as well as in the life flow, stimulating the appearance of an existential crisis.

The drug representation as object of destruction and death appears objectified in situations experienced by interviewed women, such as: withdraw from the family nucleus, rupture of affective bonds and lack of hope of returning to the life context previous from imprisonment. The coffin, the cross, the

cemetery and the black hole are configured in graphic symbols that reveal the anchoring of these representations in psychic and affective spheres of participants.

The social representations are created from social reality, because they are turned to recurrent phenomenon of social constructions⁽¹⁶⁾. Thus, the findings show the SR of inmates, considering those being elaborated from their experiences according to their drug involvement in a social context where they share knowledge and experience.

CONCLUSION

From the drawing-story as theme, the drug as object of social representation was anchored in affective, behavioral and psychosocial dimensions, expressing the representations from written and verbal productions of participants. Through graphics, unconscious collective characteristics are observed, because they circumstantially pertain to a specific grouping, of women in freedom privation situation.

The drugs imaginary of inmates elucidate subjectivities from the female role through a cross-sectional phenomenon in society, thus it is pertinent to know it for female health practices. Drawing-stories showed the highlight role that women perform in the drug phenomenon, marked by the consumption and involvement with drug trafficking, caused by new experiences or as escape of existential problems.

The object “drug” was apprehended as a negative element and intrinsically related to death. In this aspect, the representation also constitutes as a local knowledge, that is, it is instituted and imposed in a pertaining group, normally subordinated to the experience as a subjective experience in shapes of socially built and shared categories.

To access the SR surrounding drugs phenomenon under the women’s perspective in prison situation allows comprehension of the ways of how these women create and interpret this problematic. Besides, it was possible to collate how they symbolize, prolonging it beyond physical and psycho-affective dimensions, trying to identify the most relevant impacts for their health.

Thus, such aspects raise the inspiration of questions for future studies and/or developments. The affective load is one of them, in function of surpassing the experience/expertise by the imprisonment occasion condition due to drugs involvement that, as seen in here, assumed the eminent negative idea by its association with death, configuring a mark, for a group of women in this condition.

Acknowledgements

To the team of the Female Penitentiary Complex of Salvador, for the support in the development of this study; to the nurse Vanessa Moreira, for the application of the drawing-story as theme. To the Professor Evanilda Carvalho, for the incentive to elaborate this article.

Funding

To the CNPq for financing the project “Female role in the phenomenon of drugs and impacts on female

health”, by the public notice MCT/CNPq/SPM-PR/MDA Nº 020/2010, for development in the period of 2010-2012.

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