





Risk behaviors predictive of obesity in adolescents: Reflections from the conceptual perspective of Alfred Schutz

Comportamentos de risco preditores da obesidade em adolescentes: reflexões sob o prisma conceitual de Alfred Schutz

Comportamientos de riesgo predictores de obesidad en adolescentes: reflexiones desde la perspectiva conceptual de Alfred Schutz

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on the risk behaviors predictive of obesity from the conceptual perspective of the philosopher Alfred Schutz. **Methods:** theoretical reflection organized into two central categories: I. Characterization of the philosopher and his references; II. Risk behaviors predictive of obesity in adolescents under Schutz's conceptions. **Results:** Schutz's personal and academic biography and the framework that underpinned his philosophy were portrayed. The "world of life" of adolescents was discussed, and reflections were made that associate Schutz's postulates such as motivations, represented by "reasons why" and "reasons for", with the main behaviors that trigger obesity in adolescents. **Final considerations:** through the assertions made by the philosopher in question, it is possible to identify themes present in the universe of adolescents with obesity that are relevant for understanding the phenomenon and outlining possible interventions in the areas of obesity prevention and control.

Descriptors: Health Risk Behaviors; Adolescent; Obesity.

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir acerca dos comportamentos de risco preditores da obesidade sob o prisma conceitual do filósofo Alfred Schutz. **Métodos:** reflexão teórica organizada em duas categorias centrais: I. Caracterização do filósofo e suas referências; II. Comportamentos de risco preditores da obesidade em adolescentes sob as concepções de Schutz. **Resultados:** foi retratada a biografia pessoal e acadêmica de Schutz e o referencial que embasou sua filosofia. Discutiu-se sobre o "mundo da vida" dos adolescentes e foram tecidas reflexões que associam os postulados de Schultz como as motivações, representadas pelos "motivos por que" e "motivos para", aos principais comportamentos que desencadeiam a obesidade em adolescentes. **Considerações finais:** por meio das asserções feitas pelo filósofo em pauta, é possível identificar temas presentes no universo de adolescentes com obesidade que são relevantes para compreensão do fenômeno e para traçar possíveis intervenções nos eixos de prevenção e controle da obesidade.

Descritores: Comportamentos de Risco à Saúde; Adolescente; Obesidade.

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre los comportamientos de riesgo que predicen la obesidad desde la perspectiva conceptual del filósofo Alfred Schutz. **Método:** reflexión teórica organizada en dos categorías centrales: I. Caracterización del filósofo y sus referencias; II. Comportamientos de riesgo que predicen la obesidad en adolescentes bajo las concepciones de Schutz. **Resultados:** se retrató la biografía personal y académica de Schutz y el marco que sustentó su filosofía. Fue discutido el “mundo de la vida” de los adolescentes y se tejieron reflexiones que asocian los postulados de Schutz con las motivaciones, representadas por “razones de por qué” y “razones para”, con los principales comportamientos desencadenantes de la obesidad en adolescentes. **Consideraciones finales:** a través de las afirmaciones del filósofo en cuestión, es posible identificar temas presentes en el universo de los adolescentes con obesidad que son relevantes para la comprensión del fenómeno y para delinear posibles intervenciones en las áreas de prevención y control de la obesidad.

Descriptores: Conductas de Riesgo para la Salud; Adolescente; Obesidad.

INTRODUCTION

Health risk behaviors are characterized by actions that induce damage to health, either over a long or short period (depending on the behavior adopted). Thus, exposure to a health risk behavior can cause irreversible problems to the individual's life or even lead to death^(1,2).

Health risk behaviors can be developed at any stage of life; however, there is evidence of a high prevalence of these behaviors in adolescence. Given this scenario, the prevention of health risk behaviors in adolescence has been discussed internationally. Major studies have sought to investigate health risk behaviors adopted by adolescents, and, among their main findings, behaviors related to unhealthy eating and physical inactivity stand out as practices that have a direct association with obesity⁽³⁾.

Obesity, which is considered a global health problem, has been growing exponentially over the years, especially among children and adolescents⁽⁴⁾. According to estimates by the World Health Organization, more than 340 million children and adolescents worldwide are overweight⁽⁵⁾.

Obesity can be characterized as the excessive accumulation of body fat and is a severe health problem with a multicausal nature, which increases the risk of developing biopsychosocial issues, such as dyslipidemia, diabetes, cardiovascular and liver diseases, depression, anxiety, sleep complications, isolation, among others, all of which have a negative impact on the adolescent's quality of life and are perpetuated in adulthood, contributing to an ill society⁽⁶⁾.

Research shows a strong relationship between behavior and obesity, and also indicates therapies, whose proposed treatment focuses on habits and behaviors^(7,8). Thus, there is a need to promote changes in adolescents' behaviors, but in order to do so, it is necessary to identify health risk behaviors initially and only then propose interventions⁽²⁾.

It is, therefore, clear that a phenomenon as complex as obesity should not be examined solely from the perspective of epidemiological studies. An immersion in the meanings and senses must be made, which can be better understood from a philosophical framework, especially when it comes to obesity in children and adolescents⁽⁹⁾.

Looking at behaviors that predict obesity and reflecting on them, based on a philosophical vision, tends to broaden the horizons of knowledge in this area, revealing aspects that were previously unexplored, but can be useful for coping with the disease and providing a better understanding of the person affected.

In this sense, the works of Schutz^(10,11) present a set of ideas that point toward the everyday world and people's actions in it, their relationships, and how they are influenced or can influence the world around them. In addition, they refer to action and motivation, culminating in the decision to adhere to the behavior. Thus, the objective of this study was to reflect on the risk behaviors that predict obesity from the conceptual perspective of the philosopher Alfred Schutz.

METHODS

This text is a theoretical reflection that began during the first semester of 2023, based on readings, individual reflections, and collective debates in the Philosophy and Epistemology of Science course offered as part of the academic doctorate course in Nursing at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN).

Schutz's postulates, expressed mainly in his works “The Structures of the Life-World” and “On Phenomenology and Social Relations,” were used in this reflection.

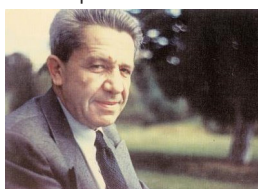
The text is structured in two categories: the first deals with the chosen author and his theoretical foundations; the second refers to the reflection itself on the behaviors

that cause obesity, discussed based on the philosopher's perception.

PHILOSOPHER'S CHARACTERIZATION AND REFERENCES

Alfred Schutz was an important Austrian philosopher and sociologist. He was born in Vienna, in 1899, and lived out his final days in New York, dying prematurely in 1959. Unlike some philosophers who had troubled lives and family disagreements, Schutz was raised in a structured family that provided him with affection, support, and good living conditions. Although his father died months before his birth, he was adopted by his uncle, a man of great wealth, who married his mother⁽¹²⁾.

Figure 1 - Alfred Schutz photo



Source: Wikimedia Commons (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schutz1.jpg>)

At seventeen, he finished secondary school and joined the army, during which he fought in the First World War. Afterward, he graduated in law and social sciences from the University of Vienna and received a doctorate in law from the same institution. During his studies, he was mentored by Hans Kelson, Friedrich von Wieser, and Ludwig von Mises⁽¹³⁾.

Max Weber, Henri Bergson, and Edmund Husserl also strongly influenced Schutz's conceptions. As he immersed himself in Weber's works, the philosopher observed the absence of a specific conceptual basis to support a method for the social sciences, so he turned to Bergson to fill these gaps. He also used Bergson's consciousness philosophy framework to clarify aspects of action and meaning. Not satisfied in his search, he found in Husserl the foundation for sociology with a comprehensive phenomenological orientation, his grand theory^(12,14).

In general terms, Schutz's theory defends human subjectivity as an important part of the social structure and, therefore, should not be disregarded by scientific knowledge; on the contrary, it should be incorporated into this field. This makes it possible to apply structural elements from the phenomenological perspective to knowledge in the social sciences⁽¹⁵⁾.

In this theory, the philosopher is concerned with how human beings live, relate, and are influenced by the intersubjective relationships established. To this end, Schutz explores the various contexts of the "life-world"

in an attempt to understand the factors that influence and determine human conduct⁽¹⁶⁾.

RISK BEHAVIORS PREDICTIVE OF OBESITY IN ADOLESCENTS UNDER SCHUTZ'S CONCEPTIONS

In general, Schutz's studies focus on understanding how human beings give meaning to their experiences. In light of his ideas, it is possible to uncover behaviors that predict obesity while investigating the construction of meanings to understand the phenomena that lead to the adoption of these behaviors.

Schutz proposed social relations as the interpretative basis for the individual's action in the world. Therefore, it becomes apparent in the course of his writings that the social world is not fixed but is constantly being (re) constructed through the actions of individuals and their relationships with other subjects and with the world objects⁽¹⁷⁾.

From this perspective, adolescents experience a phase in which social engagement is seen as paramount; therefore, their actions aim to meet their peers' expectations⁽¹⁸⁾. This demand takes on a different meaning for each individual, which may or may not trigger risky behaviors. This assigned meaning is triggered by the biographical situation, which concerns the position humans assume through their previous experiences.

A priori, a fundamental concept that appears in Schutz's works, which is applicable in the field of this reflection, is that of the "life-world", which refers to the field of everyday experiences that are operationalized through the natural attitude, characterized as a state of awareness of reality. It should be pointed out that the "life-world" is not just about the natural world, in which individual experience is circumscribed, but also considers the social and cultural context in which human beings act among their fellow human beings and receive influence from them so that it can be characterized as an intersubjective space^(10,11).

The "life-world" of adolescents with obesity is surrounded by a series of issues that mainly involve the school and their family since it is in these contexts that the so-called obesogenic environments are perpetuated, i.e., spaces that contribute to the adoption of habits that favor obesity by encouraging inappropriate behaviors, such as an inadequate diet and physical inactivity^(19,20).

It should be noted that the "life-world" is subject to intervention; however, it can also be altered through intersubjective action, which indicates that adolescents with obesity may not initially be prone to developing certain behaviors that predict obesity. Still, when interacting with other individuals, they may develop them.

In order to obtain a more robust explanation of this issue, it is necessary to use an important theoretical element called typification.

Typification can be seen as the individual's way of understanding and comprehending the world, and the internalization of this world knowledge is mediated by the social position the subject occupies in the "life-world" and the relationships established within it⁽¹⁶⁾.

In summary, typification is a lens through which humans see the world and decide how to act. From this perspective, the adolescent's adoption of a risk behavior that predicts obesity, although harmful, can be typified as something positive.

An example of this is food at school. Children and adolescents sometimes have access to adequate food at home but choose to buy food from the school cafeteria under the influence of their friends. The food offered in this space is, generally, ultra-processed, sweet, and fried, which contributes to the development of obesity⁽²¹⁾. While the presence of friends contributes to the choice and consumption of unhealthy foods, the opposite is also true; i.e., in the absence of friends, it is common for individuals to make healthier food choices⁽²²⁾.

In this context, it is important to point out that, despite research proving that friends induce unhealthy eating habits, every action carried out by human beings starts from consciousness, which in turn is endowed with subjectivity, demonstrating that the author of the action is the one who makes the final decision. Thus, actions are triggered by a motive, which, in general, is to achieve an objective determined by the subject⁽¹⁰⁾.

Therefore, if the adolescent chooses to adopt a risky behavior, it means that following their friends is more beneficial for them. For Schutz⁽¹¹⁾, this shows that the social actor's decisions can only be understood when their motivations are analyzed.

The system for interpreting individuals' actions in the world can be expressed in two categories: one subjective, called "reasons for", and the other objective, represented by "reasons why". The "motives for" are intentional and refer to the actor's future, something that they want to achieve but is not always achievable. The "reasons why", on the other hand, focus on the explanation and deal with the actor's past, anchored in previous experiences, but in an unconscious way⁽¹¹⁾.

Transcribing these concepts to the field of obesity and risk behaviors, we must initially emphasize specific behaviors, the most common of which are linked to diet and physical activity. For this reason, physical inactivity and a sedentary lifestyle will be taken as an example. The "reasons for" not adhering to physical activity may be related to the desire to stay in a comfortable environment

and not wear oneself out physically. The "reasons why" may be linked to traumas, such as segregation during practical lessons at school, the fact that the adolescent gets tired quickly during training, or even having to wear clothes that expose their body.

It should be emphasized that the "reasons for" mentioned here are the author's own statements and need to be analyzed with caution so that they do not encourage the process of stigmatizing adolescents with obesity, reinforcing the image of someone who does not change their actions due to a lack of desire.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although obesity in adolescents has been the subject of much research in recent years, there is little prospect of studies on the risk behaviors that predict this disease, often limited to working with issues related to diet and physical activity, which are important but are not the only ones.

In view of this, Alfred Schutz's theoretical conceptions are essential for studying and reflecting on risk behaviors that predict the development of obesity in adolescents. This philosopher's postulates make it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under discussion, raising the need to start from the perception of the actors themselves in order to understand better their motivations and the meanings attributed to them, and only then will it be possible to intervene coherently, obtaining effective results in terms of obesity prevention and control.

Schutz's theory is dynamic and comprehensive, which facilitates its application in different scenarios, such as research into person-centered care or the investigation of the nurse-patient relationship. Thus, further studies are recommended based on Schutz's theoretical and philosophical conceptions, not just limited to the classic methods of producing scientific knowledge.

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Conflict of interests

None.

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VR: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; and Writing – review & editing.

JGS: Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; and Writing – review & editing.

HTAS: Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; and Writing – review & editing.

JSAO: Investigation; Methodology; Writing – original draft; and Writing – review & editing.

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