

The Structure and Mute Zone of Social Representations Made by Members of the Municipal Council for the Rights of the Elderly

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Abstract

The Municipal Council of the Elderly is the body established by law to watch over the rights of the elderly and it is up to them to submit, opine, discuss, debate and decide, by vote, issues related to the rights of the elderly. The objective of this research is to identify and analyze how the social representations of counselors about the elderly municipal council are organized and the possible elements that make up the mute zone. A total of 72 counselors participated in the survey, who answered a sociodemographic questionnaire and a hierarchical free speech evocation test in situations of normal collection and substitution, based on the inductive term “municipal council of the elderly”. The data were analyzed by the Prototypic Analysis and the Centrality Index of Social Representations from Evocations. The results showed that although the council is normatively represented as a body for the defense and guarantee of the rights of the elderly, elements of the mute zone in the central nucleus point it, against normatively, as an inefficient, unknown body of denunciation, which needs better planning and reorganization. It was considered that all social representation is masked, requiring further research on the subject.

Keywords: Public policies, social representation, old age.

Estrutura e Zona Muda das Representações Sociais de Conselheiros Municipais do Idoso

Resumo

O Conselho Municipal do Idoso é o órgão de direito instituído para zelar pelos direitos dos idosos e cabe a eles, submeter, opinar, discutir, debater e decidir, por meio de voto, assuntos relacionados aos direitos do idoso. O objetivo desta pesquisa é identificar e analisar como se organizam as representações sociais de conselheiros sobre o conselho municipal do idoso e os possíveis elementos que compõem a zona muda. Participaram da pesquisa 72 conselheiros, que responderam questionário sociodemográfico e Teste de Evocação Livre de Palavras hierarquizada em situações de coleta normal e substituição, a partir do termo indutor “conselho municipal do idoso”. Os dados foram analisados pela Análise Prototípica e

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pelo Índice de Centralidade de Representações Sociais a partir de Evocações. Os resultados apontaram que apesar do conselho ser representado normativamente como órgão de defesa e garantia dos direitos dos idosos, elementos da zona muda no núcleo central o aponta, contra normativamente, como órgão de denúncias, ineficiente, desconhecido, que precisa melhor planejamento e reorganização. Considerou-se, que toda representação social encontra-se mascarada, havendo necessidade de novas pesquisas sobre a temática.

Palavras-chave: Políticas públicas, representação social, velhice.

Estructura y Zona Muda de Representaciones Sociales de Consejeros Municipales del Anciano

Resumen

Consejo Municipal del Anciano es órgano de derecho instituido para velar por derechos de ancianos, e que corresponde a ellos, someter, opinar, discutir, debatir y decidir, por medio de voto, asuntos relacionados los derechos del anciano. El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar y analizar cómo se organizan las representaciones sociales de consejeros sobre el consejo municipal del anciano y los posibles elementos que componen la zona muda. Participaron, 72 consejeros, que respondieron cuestionario sociodemográfico y Test Evocación Libre de Palabras jerarquizada en situaciones de recolección de normal y de sustitución, a partir del término inductor “consejo municipal del ancianos”. Datos fueron analizados por Análisis Prototípico y por Índice de Centralidad de Representaciones Sociales a partir de Evocaciones. Resultados apuntaron que apesar de que consejo es representado normativamente como órgano de defensa y garantía de derechos de los ancianos, elementos de la zona muda en el núcleo central lo apunta, contra normativamente, como órgano de denuncias, ineficiente, desconocido, que necesita mejor planificación y reorganización. Se consideró, que toda representación social se encuentra enmascarada, habiendo necesidad de nuevas investigaciones sobre la temática.

Palabras claves: Políticas públicas, representación social, vejez.

Life extension is a global aspiration that can only be considered a triumph to the extent that quality of life is added to the additional years one lives. Accordingly, any policy focused on the elderly must also consider the possibility of taking action in diverse social contexts and of elaborating new meanings for life in old age. Such issues imply the need for specific public policies that are discussed by society and guaranteed by the government (Santinha & Marques, 2015).

In the present study, public policies are defined as a series of decisions that are manifested in the form of actions that are strategically selected from a range of options according to the hierarchy of values and preferences of the sociopolitical dispute. Their obligatory nature enjoys legitimate power and authority, which in turn seeks to guarantee the rights of the social group affected (Rua, 2012).

Incorporating the issue of population aging into the agenda of Brazilian public policies is not new. As a signatory of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging, which was adopted by the World Assembly on Aging (United Nations Organization) in 1982, Brazil began to more assertively incorporate this theme into its agenda, culminating in the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Giacomin, 2013).

Giving continuity to the guidelines launched by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, which were strongly influenced by the advance of international debates over the issue of aging, Brazil's Law 8842/1994, which addresses Brazil's National Policy on the Elderly (NPE), was approved in 1994 (Giacomin, 2013). The NPE's main objective is to guarantee the social rights of the elderly; right-bearing individuals whose specific needs (physical, social, financial

and political) must be given attention (Camarano & Pasinato, 2004).

Via Law 8842/1994, Brazil created Federal, State and Municipal Councils for the Rights of the Elderly, agencies responsible for the general coordination of the NPE, formed through an alliance between civil society and the government for the benefit of the elderly (Giacomin, 2013). In accordance with the resolutions approved at Brazil's 4th National Conference on the Rights of the Elderly, the Municipal Councils for the Rights of the Elderly (CMDIs in Portuguese; *Ministério das Mulheres, da Igualdade Racial e dos Direitos Humanos*, 2016) are responsible for the following: (a) supervising the creation, regulation, expansion and financing of reference centers and social assistance centers for the elderly and the homeless, community centers, day centers, shelters for the elderly, and mobile teams; (b) guaranteeing and ensuring, via the SUS (Brazil's public health system), free distribution of medications, as well as expanding the chain of popular pharmacies in municipalities; (c) stipulating the monetary donations made by companies, respecting the maximum tax-deduction limit established by Brazilian federal law; (d) guaranteeing the appointment of a qualified professional for raising funds from society and institutions, and for monitoring and financially controlling the Municipal Fund for the Elderly; (e) establishing instruments for promoting participation in councils for the rights of the elderly, aiming at implementing programs and public policies for the elderly; (f) preparing statistics and indicators related to the profile of the elderly population; (g) providing the media and public agencies with information aimed at raising awareness and encouraging appreciation of the rights of the elderly, employing language that is intelligible for all ages; (h) disseminating the Statute of the Elderly; (i) guaranteeing and expanding intersectoral assistance for the elderly, on public-policy networks; and (j) guaranteeing the creation of Municipal Bureaus for Public Policies for the Elderly and/or autonomous coordinating bodies.

Given the importance of CMDIs within the Brazilian social context, it is considered important

to identify what active council members think about the agency since, in practice, it is up to them to present, express their opinion about, discuss, debate and decide, via their vote, issues related to the rights of the elderly.

Theoretically, the explanations, beliefs and ideas common to a certain group of individuals to characterize an object are historically and socially constructed and are known as social representations (Moscovici, 2012). Moscovici (2012) defines social representations as a series of concepts, propositions and explanations that are constructed in everyday life through interpersonal communication. Based on Moscovici's original theory of social representations, complementary theories began to emerge, among them the Central Core Theory, aimed at making Moscovici's theory more heuristic for social practice and for research (Sá, 2002). The structural approach or Central Core Theory (Abric, 2001) views social representations as structures of knowledge concerning ideas socially shared by groups, made up of cognitive elements that are mutually connected, forming a dual system composed of a central core and a peripheral system.

The central core consists of elements strongly shared by the group that explain the meaning of the social representation and organize it. The elements that make up the central core are stable and consensual, exhibiting an absolute and non-negotiable character. In contrast, the peripheral system involves the majority of the representation's elements, which exhibit a character that sustains the heterogeneity of the group, of a flexible, practical nature, since they are capable of adapting the representation to individual experiences and backgrounds (Abric, 2001). The peripheral elements near the central core play an important role in concretizing the meaning of the representation; and those further from it clarify and justify the meaning (Abric, 2003). Moliner (1995) explains that the central core's schemes are normative in the sense of expressing normality, but not accuracy, while the peripheral schemes express what is common and, occasionally, exceptional, but never abnormal.

In its studies concerning the analysis of the structural components of social representations,

the Aux-de-Provence School came across a phenomenon: areas of representations that, although common to a certain group, do not reveal themselves easily in everyday discourses, for they are considered inadequate in relation to both the official discourse and prevailing social norms. Such areas are known as the “mute zone” of social representations (Abric, 2003); negative stereotypes and preconceptions are included in this category. The mute zone is a specific subgroup of thoughts and beliefs that, although available, are not expressed by individuals in normal conditions of production; and, if they were, they could cast doubt on the group’s moral values or the norms valued by the group. Hence, the mute zone exists because there are social norms in every situation; it thus possesses a counter-normative nature (Abric, 2005).

Another aspect that would lead to the existence of a mute or masked zone in social representations is what Abric (2005) characterizes as “management of impressions,” which consists of the attempt, on the part of individuals, to generate a positive self-image. Hence, the investigation concerning the hypothesis of a mute zone relates to whether counter-normative elements only appear in contexts in which regulatory pressure decreases.

Abric (2005) points out that it is important to know what type of elements are hidden, for, if they are the peripheral elements, then one is dealing with something that is not that serious. On the other hand, if they are elements that make up the central core (i.e., unspoken elements that are essential), then the entire meaning of the representation will be masked. That being the case, the present study’s objective is to identify and analyze the manner in which the council members’ social representations of the CMDI and the potential elements that make up the mute zone are organized.

Method

The present study employed a qualitative approach of an exploratory and descriptive nature, based on the structural approach to social representations.

Participants

This study employed a non-probabilistic sample made up of 72 council members between the ages of 20 and 80 years; 44 of them were full members and 28 were substitute members of CMDIs located in 6 municipalities of the western region of Greater São Paulo, Brazil.

The following sociodemographic variables were identified: With respect to sex and marital status, there were 53 women (73.7%) and 19 men (26.3%), 72 participants in all, 34 of whom declared themselves to be married (47.3%); 17, single (23.6%); 11, divorced (15.2%); and 10, widowed (13.9%). In relation to schooling, 42 participants (58.4%) declared having a complete university education; 16 (22.3%), a complete high school education; and 14 (19.3%), an incomplete elementary school education. With regard to their age group, it is worth emphasizing that 49 of the participating council members (68.1%) were under 60 years of age, while 23 were over 60 (31.9%), a fact that does not impede their participation as council members.

Instruments

Initially, in order to characterize the participants, we administered a sociodemographic questionnaire containing questions related to their sex, age, schooling, marital status, terms of employment for the CMDI, and length of service. Next, we administered the TELP word association test, which, in this case, consisted of requesting the participants to write down the first five words or expressions that came to mind in relation to the inductive term “municipal council for the rights of the elderly.” They were also instructed to rank, in order of importance, the words or expressions that were induced. Lastly, in order to analyze the potential mute zone of the social representations, we employed the Substitution Technique (Abric, 2003), aiming at reducing normative pressure and decreasing the participant’s level of personal involvement in relation to the representation of the object. In this phase, the participants were asked to explain their notions in relation to the inductive term “municipal council for the rights of the elderly”

and, subsequently, to explain what society in general thinks (Chokier & Moliner, 2006; Oliveira & Costa, 2007; Piermattéo, Monaco, Moreau, Girandola, & Tavani, 2014).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, initial contact was made with the CMDIs in order to request authorization to conduct the research. The presidents of the CMDIs were contacted by phone, and then the research project was sent by email to present the study's objectives and procedures. This documentation was authorized by the CMDI's president himself, and in several cases was submitted for approval by specific auxiliary commissions.

Subsequent to the above procedures, we scheduled visits to the CMDIs on occasions involving plenary sessions. During the CMDI plenary sessions, the study's objectives were explained to the council members and they were invited to participate. We also explained the data collection procedures, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers and that the important thing was to answer whatever came to mind, without restrictions. Subsequently, we administered the sociodemographic questionnaire, the TELP word association test and the Substitution Technique. This procedure was carried out collectively during the plenary sessions, with individual interventions by the researcher to clarify eventual doubts related to filling out the data collection instruments.

Data Analysis Procedures

For data analysis, we considered the data ranked in order of importance by the participants. Data analysis was conducted in the following order: (a) Lemmatization: This procedure consists of reducing inflected forms of words or expressions to their lexical root so that they can be analyzed as a single item in order to avoid dispersion, with the singular, most frequent or corresponding form prevailing. For example, the words *envelhecimento* ("aging" in English [gerund]), *envelhecendo* ("aging" [verb]) and

envelhecemos ("we age") were lemmatized and grouped together into the word *envelhecer* ("to age"). This strategy was employed by the present study's researchers in order to homogenize similar semantic content without altering the essential meaning of words or expressions (Wachelke, 2009; Wachelke & Wolter, 2011). (b) Prototypical Analysis: This technique entails the construction of four quadrants to indicate words that potentially make up the central structure of social representations (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011). To do so, we employed IRAMUTEQ software as a support (Camargo & Justo, 2016). (c) INCEV (roughly translated into English as "Index of Centrality of Evocation-Based Social Representations"): Conducted by the present study's researchers subsequent to the prototypical analysis, this procedure assesses the centrality of representational elements in terms of their frequency, non-conditionality and importance (Wachelke, 2009). In a complementary manner, it enables one to optimize initial data collection by confirming the centrality of first-periphery elements that were identified by the prototypical analysis. Pecora and Pereira de Sá (2008) explain that there can exist cognitions located in the first periphery of the prototypical analysis that possess characteristics that are, in fact, central. Accordingly, confirmation of such centrality is necessary in studies involving the structural approach to social representations, for elements identified as belonging to the central core in the word association task are not always truly central (Costa, Oliveira, & Formozo, 2012).

Ethical Procedures

The present study was examined and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution promoting the study (CAEE: 5545306.5.0000.5435).

Results

The evoked responses ranked in order of importance by the participants formed 2 initial matrices of the material to be analyzed. Subsequent to lemmatization to the lexical root

(equivalence classing of terms), each matrix was separately entered into the Iramuteq software in order to construct four quadrants (prototypical analysis). The criterion of the medians was employed to determine the cutoff points for distributing the evoked words in the quadrants. Since 5 responses were collected for each participant, the value of the cutoff point was 3 (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011).

In the normal data-collection situation, there were 360 evocations in all. Subsequent to lemmatization, 139 different words and an average frequency of 2.58 were identified. A frequency of 85 *hapax* was found and the index of diversity that was calculated thus corresponds to 0.38; and the index of rarity, to 0.61. These data were subjected to prototypical analysis, resulting in 41 different words (frequency equal to or greater than 3). The average order of evocation (AOE) was 2.79, and the mean frequency (Fm) was 5.49. Words with an average order of evocation less than 2.79 were classified as having a low order of evocation and were not included in the quadrants. Based on the data examined in the normal collection situation, we observed the existence of structured representations (Flament & Rouquette, 2003; Wolter & Wachelke, 2013). Table 1 presents the results of the prototypical analysis regarding the inductive term “municipal council for the rights of the elderly” in the normal situation.

Based on the word-association results presented in Table 1, it is possible to identify the manner in which the elements that make up the study participants’ social representations of the CDMI in the normal data-collection situation are organized. In the first (upper left-hand) quadrant, one observes the elements that enjoy greater predominance among the evoked terms and that are part of a probable central core of the social representations.

In the normal collection situation, the most frequent elements are *right*, *protection* and *guarantee*, although the elements *transportation* and *help* stand out the most in terms of order of importance. In the upper right-hand quadrant, the most frequent elements of the 1st periphery

are *respect* and *participation*; however, in terms of order of importance, the elements *monitoring* and *care* stand out the most. In the lower left-hand quadrant, the most frequent elements are *accessibility*, *liaison* and *public policy*, whereas, in terms of the highest order of importance, the elements are *appreciation* and *agency*. In the lower right-hand quadrant, the element *life* exhibits the highest frequency and order of importance.

In relation to the data collected in the substitution situation, a total of 360 evocations also occurred. Subsequent to lemmatization, 150 different words were identified and a mean frequency of 2.40 was observed. A frequency of 94 *hapax* was identified and the index of diversity that was calculated thus corresponds to 0.41; and the index of rarity, to 0.62. These data were subjected to prototypical analysis, resulting in 34 different words (frequency equal to or greater than 3). The average order of evocation (AOE) was 2.91, and the mean frequency (Fm) was 5.85. Words with an average order of evocation less than 2.91 were classified as having a low order of evocation and were not included in the quadrants. It was also possible to identify the existence of structural elements of the representations in the substitution situation (Flament & Rouquette, 2003; Wolter & Wachelke, 2013). Table 2 presents the results of the prototypical analysis regarding the inductive term “municipal council for the rights of the elderly” in the substitution situation.

In the substitution situation, as in the normal situation, the element *right* exhibits the highest frequency in the first (upper left-hand) quadrant, and in this case it also displays the highest order of importance. The element *solution* exhibits the second highest frequency; and the element *lack*, the second highest order of importance. In the upper right-hand quadrant, the 1st periphery’s most frequent element is *unfamiliarity*, while the element *participation*, which in the normal situation exhibited a higher frequency together with the element *respect*, in this case displays a higher order of importance together with the element *inefficiency*. In the

Table 1
Prototypical Analysis with Reference to the Inductive Term “Municipal Council for the Rights of the Elderly” Conducted in the Normal Situation (N = 72)

		Average Order of Evocation ≤ 2.79		Average Order of Evocation > 2.79			
		Evoked Term	Frequency	Order of Importance	Evoked Term	Frequency	Order of Importance
		Central Elements			1 st Periphery Elements		
Average Frequency	≥ 5.85	Right	17	2.4			
		Protection	11	2.0			2.9
		Guarantee	11	2.2	Respect	16	2.8
		Love	9	1.8	Participation	10	3.5
		Health	8	1.8	Monitoring	8	3.3
		Improvement	7	2.3	Care	7	3.1
		Transportation	7	2.7	Responsibility	7	3.0
		Help	6	2.5	Lack	6	
		Defense	6	1.3			
		Contrasting Elements			2 nd Periphery Elements		
Average Frequency	< 5.85				Life	4	5.0
					Assistance	4	3.2
					Commitment	4	3.5
					Meeting	4	4.0
		Accessibility	4	2.5	Family	4	3.0
		Liaison	4	2.5	Union	4	4.2
		Public Policy	4	1.8	Activity	4	3.5
		Appreciation	3	2.7	Leisure	4	4.2
		Outing	3	2.3	Sr. citizen service	3	4.0
		Old age	3	2.0	Work	3	3.0
		Agency	3	2.7	Comprehension	3	3.0
		Guidance	3	2.0	Public authority	3	3.7
		Service	3	2.0	Power	3	3.7
			Interest	3	3.7		
			Affability	3	3.7		
			Benefit	3	3.3		
			Patience	3	4.0		

Note. developed based on IRaMuTeQ software results.

lower left-hand quadrant, a structure different from that of the normal situation was obtained, for the most frequent elements were *guidance* and *health*, while the most important elements were *guarantee*, *feedback* and *listening*. In the lower right-hand quadrant, the most frequently mentioned element was *information*, and the most important element was *law*.

The calculations of the indices of centrality of the results of the prototypical analysis are presented below, with the aim of optimizing

the global characteristics of the responses, as well as making it possible to compare the two situations (normal and substitution), checking for the possible existence of a mute zone in the participants' social representations of the municipal council for the rights of the elderly (Wachelke, 2009).

In order to calculate the INCEV, we employed the total frequency (F_T) criterion, which requires including in the analysis a minimum of 5% of the participants' evocations

Table 2
Prototypical Analysis with Reference to the Inductive Term “Municipal Council for Rights of the Elderly”
Conducted in the Substitution Situation ($N = 72$)

		Average Order of Evocation ≤ 2.91		Average Order of Evocation > 2.91			
		Evoked Term	Frequency	Order of Importance	Evoked Term	Frequency	Order of Importance
		Central Elements			1 st Periphery Elements		
Average Frequency ≥ 5.85	Right	14	2.9	Unfamiliarity	25	3.0	
	Solution	13	2.6	Inefficiency	11	3.5	
	Help	12	2.2	Participation	11	3.5	
	Accusation	12	1.6	Improvement	10	3.3	
	Lack	12	2.8	Family	7	3.1	
				Meeting	6	3.2	
		Contrasting Elements			2 nd Periphery Elements		
Average Frequency < 5.85	Guidance	5	2.2	Information	5	3.4	
	Health	5	2.6	Protection	4	4.4	
	Fight	4	2.2	Attention	4	3.2	
	Activity	4	2.5	Care	4	3.5	
	Listening	3	2.3	Inclusion	3	3.7	
	Work	3	1.7	Monitoring	3	3.3	
	Guarantee	3	2.7	Respect	3	3.0	
	Support	3	1.7	Sr. citizen service	3	3.3	
	Action	3	2.3	Law	3	4.7	
	Feedback	3	2.7	Lack of power	3	4.0	
	Benefit	3	2.3	Problem	3	3.3	
	Listening	3	2.7	Conversation	3	3.3	
				Complaint	3	3.7	
			Service	3	3.7		
			Affability	3	3.0		
			Aid	3	3.0		

Note. developed based on IRaMuTeQ software results.

(criterion for the frequency cutoff point). In the case of the present study, based on the sample size of 72 participants this cutoff point began at the frequency of 3.6. Hence, we considered the minimum frequency to be 4, slightly over 5% of the sample size (Wachelke, 2009; Wachelke & Wolter, 2011).

The results indicated the possibility of combining some of the words based on their corresponding semantic synonyms. Accordingly, the words resulting from the analysis of the frequency of the inductive term were grouped together in the following manner: in the normal situation, the word *right* was combined with the word *guarantee*; the element *protection*

incorporated the words *defense*, *help* and *assistance*; and the element *responsibility* incorporated the words *commitment* and *care*. The words *monitoring*, *liaison*, *life*, *activity* and *leisure* were excluded since it was not possible to incorporate them into corresponding synonyms. The words *meeting* and *union* were also excluded, due to the fact that they did not present an order of evocation of high symbolic value (i.e., evoked in first place). The remaining words assumed their corresponding semantic field individually.

In the substitution situation, the word *help* was incorporated into the word *protection*. The words *information*, *activity*, *attention* and

precautions were excluded since it was not possible to integrate them into corresponding synonyms and because they did not present an order of evocation of high symbolic value (i.e., evoked in first place). The remaining words assumed their corresponding semantic field individually.

The calculations were then repeated taking into account the groupings of words based on their respective semantic synonyms. Based on the results of this second analysis, we checked the frequency of evocation of the words evoked

in first place (high symbolic value). Next, we calculated the ratios of high symbolic value (P_{vs}) by dividing the number of occurrences of each word in the first rank of evocations (F_R) by the total frequency (F_T) of each *corpus*, in accordance with the formula established by Wachelke (2009): $P_{vs} = F_R / F_T$. Subsequently, the INCEV was calculated by dividing the number of occurrences of high symbolic value (F_R) by the total number of participants in the sample (N), thus applying the formula $INCEV = F_R / N$, yielding a result that ranges from 0 to 1. Table 3 presents the results of these calculations:

Table 3
Index of Centrality of the Elements of Social Representations Regarding the “Municipal Council for the Rights of the Elderly” in the Normal and Substitution Situations (N = 72)

Municipal Council for the Rights of the Elderly (Normal Situation)					Municipal Council for the Rights of the Elderly (Substitution Situation)				
Words	Frequency		P_{vs}	INCEV	Words	Frequency		P_{vs}	INCEV
	<i>f</i> total	<i>f</i> rank 1				<i>f</i> total	<i>f</i> rank 1		
Guarantee/ right	28	15	0.53	0.20	Unfamiliarity	25	6	0.24	0.08
Protection/ defense/help/ assistance	27	9	0.33	0.12	Help and protection	16	6	0.37	0.08
Responsibility/ care/ commitment	18	2	0.11	0.02	Right	14	3	0.21	0.04
Respect	16	4	0.25	0.05	Solution	13	4	0.30	0.05
Participation	10	4	0.40	0.05	Accusation	12	6	0.50	0.08
Love	9	4	0.44	0.05	Lack	12	2	0.16	0.02
Health	8	5	0.62	0.06	Inefficiency	11	2	0.18	0.02
Improvement	7	2	0.28	0.02	Participation	11	1	0.09	0.01
Transportation	7	1	0.14	0.01	Improvement	10	2	0.20	0.02
Lack	6	1	0.16	0.01	Family	7	1	0.14	0.01
Accessibility	4	1	0.25	0.01	Meeting	6	1	0.16	0.01
Public Policy	4	1	0.25	0.01	Guidance	5	2	0.40	0.02
Family	4	1	0.25	0.01	Health	5	1	0.20	0.01
					Fight	4	2	0.50	0.02

Note. Developed by the authors.

Legend: *f* = frequency; P_{vs} = high symbolic value ratios; INCEV = index of centrality of the evoked elements.

The ratio of centrality of an element must be greater than 50% ($Pvs \geq 0.51$). Elements with an INCEV ≥ 0.10 are considered central. Elements with an INCEV value close to 0.10 are considered salient or over-activated peripheral elements. The remaining elements, with values well below 0.10, are common peripheral elements (Wachelke, 2009).

Based on the calculations we performed, we were able to confirm *guarantee of rights* as the central element in the normal situation; and in the substitution situation, *accusation* was the most central element. The elements *protection*, *defense*, *help* and *assistance* can be considered salient or over-activated peripheral elements in the normal situation because they yielded values close to centrality (Wachelke, 2009). In the substitution situation, the peripheral elements *help and/or protection* and *unfamiliarity* scored the highest. In light of the present analysis, one may thus affirm the existence of elements that comprise a mute zone of the participants' social representations regarding "municipal council for the rights of the elderly."

Discussion

At this point, it would be appropriate to analyze the manner in which the explicit (normative) and implicit (counter-normative) elements in the structure of the council members' social representations are organized. It is worth emphasizing that the decision to use ranked evocations in the normal and substitution situations enabled us to appreciate cognitive reorganization and the affective importance attributed to the phenomenon under investigation. Such a strategy makes it possible to identify potential masking caused by normative forces existing in social contexts (Chokier & Moliner, 2006; Flament, Guimelli, & Abric, 2006; Oliveira & Costa, 2007; Piermattéo & Guimelli, 2012).

The prospective elements of the central core of the social representations regarding the CMDI (normal situation) relate to the normative discourse expressed in the legislation that guarantees, protects and defends the rights of

the elderly (*Estatuto do Idoso*, 2012; Giacomin, 2013). Abric (2001) states that this normative dimension can exhibit striking patterns, stereotypes or attitudes in the central core of the representation. In this sense, the council members follow socially accepted standards when they highlight the areas of health and, above all, public transportation as elements in need of improvement.

Due to a consensual comparative bias in the structural framework (Abric, 2001), the existence of a mute zone was identified in these representations, for although the intensity of the element *right* continues in the substitution situation, the CMDI is strongly represented as a "whistleblower agency" that seeks to provide assistance in and/or resolve situations involving noncompliance with such rights. Accordingly, one may infer that the meaning of the representation as a whole is masked because, according to Abric (2003), any alteration in the core promotes the transformation of the entire representation; that is, the entire meaning of the representation is masked.

Guarantee of rights was confirmed in the central core of the social representations in the normal situation, which was expected in light of the council members' familiarity with the legislation. In the substitution situation, the unmasking of the element *accusation*, although not confirmed, exhibited centrality levels quite close to what was expected. In this case, the responses could have been influenced by the participants' need to preserve their image and simultaneously transmit a positive self-image (Abric, 2003). Clemence, Doise, and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2013) explain that it is natural that the principles of social regulation organize common representations, but that does not impede the diversity of stances taken; and, in order to comprehend this process, it is necessary to reconsider the way individuals adapt to the everyday reality of their context of origin.

The prototypical analysis of the potential peripheral elements most cited in the normal situation revealed the role legally attributed to council members and to the normative discourse: the responsibility of supervising, looking after,

respecting and encouraging participation in favor of senior citizens' interests. As observed, the council members experience difficulties to fully carry out such functions. These peripheries were considered common peripheries in the confirmatory analysis, characterizing, as over-activated peripheries, several first-quadrant elements whose centrality was not confirmed: *protection, defense, help* and *assistance* (Wachelke, 2009).

Once again, this time in the first periphery, one perceives the possible existence of a mute zone. Based on the representational elements of this periphery, it appears that the CMDI is an inefficient agency in need of improvement, such as increased councilmember participation in meetings and greater dissemination of the CMDI so that families of the elderly become familiar with it. Together with the *help and/or protection* elements, which were confirmed as an over-activated periphery in the normal situation, the *unfamiliarity* element, which was confirmed as a peripheral element in the substitution situation, exhibits functions that are essential for comprehending the centrality of the representation. With the CMDI being considered a "whistleblower" agency in the substitution situation, the elements *protection* and *help* can serve the function of defending the central core from contradictory elements, as is the case of the CMDI being considered an agency unknown to the public (Abric, 2003). Incorporation of this periphery into the central core could lead to new interpretations with eventual implications for the protection of senior citizens' rights, to the detriment of denouncing the offenses suffered. The elements *solution, right* and *improvement*, which were shown to be common peripheries by the INCEV, can be associated with the regulatory function of the periphery (i.e., with the role of protecting the stability of the central core of the representation; Flament & Rouquette, 2003).

Along these lines, it is also worth analyzing the elements that most stood out in the contrast zone and second periphery. The contrast zone contains representational elements that could have been structured by a minority group (Abric, 2003) that represents the CMDI as an agency that

should formulate public policies that value senior citizens' access to public areas, both municipal and recreational, as well as supervising the services provided to this population. However, evidence of the existence of a mute zone in these representations attributes to the CMDI the function of guaranteeing, defending and supporting the rights of the elderly and of taking action for their benefit, by way of listening to their complaints and helping them solve their real problems, as well as intensifying the need to counsel them in regard to health-related matters. Such inferences indicate the probable existence of a minority subgroup that identifies the need for an attitude that promotes activism in favor of the elderly.

Lastly, we will examine the representational elements that are farthest from the probable central core of the representations, elements that are less valued and are shared by a smaller number of participants: *family, work* and *understanding* in the normal situation; and *respect, affability* and *aid* in the substitution situation. These representational elements, which are far-removed from the council members' priorities, are related to the stereotypical image of old age: incapacity, deficiency, unproductivity and social isolation (Daniel, Antunes, & Amaral, 2015; Fernandes & Andrade, 2016).

In this sense, it is presumed that such council members adhere to social norms due to social pressure, but there can also be intrinsic motives consistent with internalized norms that guide the council members' assessment of whether a certain attitude is right or wrong in relation to the object of the representation (Thogersen, 2006). Flament et al. (2006) explain that individuals face social pressures that are more or less severe depending on their level of sensitivity to the object of the representation. They emphasize that a social representation may not be unique, and that it can contain apparently contradictory elements.

Social representations are generally constructed according to the norms and values of social groups; occasionally, they can also incorporate beliefs that are contrary to such norms and values (Chokier & Moliner, 2006).

Hence, the construction of the council members' attitudes depends on the way they perceive the norms imposed on them. Social pressure can lead the council members to conceal stereotypical responses because they consider such responses to be related to normative standards or because they want to create good impressions of themselves. Abric (2003) points out that, in situations involving social interactions, judgments or evaluative stances, normative elements are activated.

Final Considerations

The present study sought to ascertain the manner in which social representations are organized and identify possible elements that make up the mute zone of representations made by members of the municipal council for the rights of the elderly concerning the CMDI. The results enabled us to conclude that the normative social representations of such council members are organized in the following manner: The element *right* (of the elderly) stands out in the central core as being associated with the need for support and health care improvements, especially in the area of transportation for the elderly. In the first periphery, the functions that stood out the most were those that are normally expected by CMDI council members: to monitor, care for, hold responsible, respect and participate. The contrast zone seems to indicate a minority group that formulates public policies that value senior citizens' access to public areas, both municipal and recreational, as well as supervising the services provided to this population. The second periphery contains the elements that are most far-removed from the central core of the representation: family, work and understanding.

With respect to the probability of a mute zone in the social representations concerning the CMDI, it was possible to identify contra-normative elements by examining the following organization: As in the normal situation, the element *right* (of the elderly) continues to stand out in the central core; nonetheless, in the substitution situation, the CMDI appears as a whistleblower agency that seeks to improve

and/or resolve situations involving the non-enforcement of the rights of the elderly. In the first periphery, the CMDI is represented as an inefficient agency in need of improvement, such as increased councilmember participation in meetings and greater awareness of the CMDI's existence on the part of senior citizens' families. The contrast zone portrays the CMDI as being in need of council members with a more proactive stance in relation to the needs of the elderly. The second periphery contains the elements farthest from the central core of the representation: respect, affability and aid.

The centrality of the element *guarantee of rights* was confirmed in the normal situation, whereas, in the substitution situation, *accusation* was the most central element. In the periphery, what stood out was the possibility of a mute zone that presents the CMDI's difficulty to protect senior citizens' rights, for it is an unknown agency. The analyzed results must be recognized as being specific to the context under study, although they could also aid comprehension of the objectives of the actions of the government together with civil society, guiding public policies for the elderly.

In conclusion, one may infer that comprehension of the social representations regarding the CMDI helps clarify the council members' conceptions in light of the demands and responsibilities of the work they perform. Although the CMDI was normatively established as a legal entity, the significant violations of senior citizens' rights in Brazilian society is unmasked by the possibility of a mute zone that represents the CMDI as an inefficient and unknown whistleblower agency that requires better planning and reorganization in order to effectively enforce the rights of the elderly.

In summary, confirmation of the mute zone of the social representations reveals that the council members are unprepared, and that they enjoy the support of neither the public authorities nor civil society to enforce the rights of the elderly. It is probable that the general public's unfamiliarity with the CMDI's existence is what leads society to avoid demanding the implementation of public policies for senior

citizens. Consequently, given the importance of the council members' functions and the results of their work for the CMDI, this situation could cause them to feel impotent and unappreciated.

The present study's limitations were mainly the result of the difficulties we ran into to contact all of the active members of the council. This occurred because, in addition to being on the council, the members have other responsibilities that make it impossible for them to attend the council's plenary sessions. In order to further develop the present theme, we recommend future studies focused on councilmember-training strategies in order to offer council members the opportunity to acquire knowledge so as to better deal with the conflicts that exist in the CMDI.

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