SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION, CARE AND ELDERLY CAREGIVERS

REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DE IMIGRANTES LATINOS AMERICANOS ACERCA DE IMIGRAÇÃO, CUIDADOS E CUIDADORES DE PESSOAS IDOSAS

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ABSTRACT

Ageing in Spain has increased considerably and elderly people often find themselves in a situation of great dependence. Facing this situation, many have had the support of immigrant caregivers from Latin America. This research had the purpose to know the social representations (SR) of these caregivers, living in Valencia (Spain), about immigration, care and elderly care. It involved the participation of 35 immigrants who responded the Word Association Test and a socio-demographic questionnaire. The results revealed that the SR on immigration reflect "nostalgia", care was represented by "help", and care for the elderly by "respect". It is concluded that the SR allow understanding the symbolic, affective and cognitive activities in their process of social interaction. It is hoped that these findings will contribute to studies of migration at the international level, promoting positive changes for these groups.

Keywords: social representations; immigrations; care; elderly care.

RESUMO

O envelhecimento na Espanha tem aumentado consideravelmente. Estas pessoas idosas muitas vezes se veem em uma situação de grande dependência e, no enfrentamento dessa situação, muitos têm contado com o apoio de cuidadores imigrantes da América Latina. Esta investigação teve o objetivo de conhecer as Representações Sociais (RS) desses cuidadores, residentes na cidade de Valencia (Espanha), acerca da imigração, cuidado e cuidado de pessoas idosas. Participaram 35 imigrantes cuidadores que responderam o Teste de Associação Livre de Palavras e um questionário sociodemográfico. Os resultados revelaram que as RS sobre a imigração refletem a "nostalgia", os cuidados foram representados pela "ajuda" e cuidados ao idoso pelo "respeito". Conclui-se que as RS possibilitam conhecer as atividades simbólicas, afetivas e cognitivas em seu processo de interação social. Espera-se que tais resultados contribuam para os estudos das migrações no âmbito internacional, favorecendo mudanças positivas para estes grupos.

Palavras-chave: representações sociais; imigração; cuidados; cuidados com as pessoas idosas.

Since old times, the displacements of people have been presented as a human and natural process, but from the development of capitalist relations of production, of technological development and globalization, people have migrated in a general way to relocate in search for better wages and conditions of life. What has been argued in this new millennium, are the new forms, the new scales and the unprecedented volumes that the international migratory phenomenon has reached in the present time (Ramos, 2008).

However, the great motivations that explain the unalterable decision to migrate remain based in the past. The economic inequalities among nations, politics, social and ecological unbalance, technological development, and the low cost and risk of transportation, all cause continuous flows of human beings from the poor zones to those where the living conditions are better. From the past until the present time, these aspects continue *"to control"* in what refers to the proximate causes for the immigratory phenomenon, with clear advantage for the economic question. The decision to migrate can also have its origin in familiar, personal, religious, cultural, and even mere demographic aspects (Villareal, 2008, p. 94).

The statisticians of international migration are revealing, according to United Nations Population Fund (FNU), that the number of people who live outside of their native country passed from 75 million in 1965, to 120 million in 1990, 150 million in 2000, and 185 million in 2004 (Machado, Santana, Carreiro, Nogueira, Barroso, & Dias, 2007; UNFPA, 2005). The Report on the *United Nations Population Division* [UNFPA] mentions that currently there are 200 million migrants in the world, that is, 3.2% of the world-wide population, of which 43 million (30%) are in America, 40 million (20%) in Europe, and the remainder in Asia, being carried out mainly for economic reasons. In addition, 94.5 million of those are women.

It must be highlighted that during the last decade an increasing internationalization of the labor market has been verified, followed by an acceleration of the migratory flows that choose Spain in general, and Valencia in particular, as the final destination for their migratory project. These immigrants have as basic traces the feminization, the Latin origin and the irregular character. It has been distinguished that the increase of these international migratory movements has called the attention of diverse disciplines in social sciences, as well as in social psychology (Berry, 2001; Vala, Lopes, & Lima, 2008).

Latin America for a long time has exported people to other parts of the world in view of its levels of economic development, job opportunities and perspectives, which have been at disadvantaged when compared with more prosperous regions of the world (Solimano, 2009). One has pointed also the demographic growth and the current size of the population of Latin America as an important factor with respect to its immigration into Europe. The process of globalization still has been highlighted in Latin America, beyond the economic factors that do not have the same importance for all countries (Pellegrino, 2004).

In accordance with the data of the *Comissión Económica para America Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL), contained in the Social Panorama of Latin America (2004), the migration flow of Latin Americans that lived outside of their country of birth in the years of 1990 reached 20 million. It also highlights the presence of 840 thousand Latin Americans in Spain which, in this way, has been converted into the second pole of appeal to the Latin American immigration in Europe.

Since the last decade, Valencia has received an important increase of the immigrant population. During the year 2010 the legal immigrant population of Valencia represented 17.4% of the population, whereas in Spain the immigrants constituted 12.1%

of the population to the country. Within the different works that immigrants carry out, the sector of services occupies the first place with 85% (CEIMIGRA, 2008) and a large part of these services is dedicated to home care, representing 43.1% of the unprofessional caregivers (Pajares, 2005). This situation, in which a large part of the caregivers in the elderly residences is of immigrants from diverse cultures, is what is going to be studied in depth (Sterritt & Pokorny, 1998).

In sum, the process of ageing to the Spanish population is increasing progressively the number of people in situation of dependence, that is, of those that cannot carry out the activities of the everyday life and need help to perform them. According to IMSERSO data (2005), in 5.1% of the Spanish homes live people that provide help to the people over 60 years old in those routine life tasks that they cannot perform by themselves.

Immigration and not - professional care

Due to the ageing of the population and to the increase of degenerative illnesses, there are ever more caregivers that occupy this position by an increasingly longer period (Casado & López, 2001). These new caregivers are the ones who have the responsibility for the care with people that need. Thus, the care of the elderly people by immigrants represents an important resource of support. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) indicates that it will be the immigrant population that will be in charge of the elderly care.

The immigrant caregivers are fulfilling with the function of improving the elderly life. In the study of Berjano, Ariño and Llopis (2004), about the work offering announcements, they observed that 68.3% of these announcements are demands for elderly care, and that 82.5% of the irregular immigrants seek for work among domestic activities and elderly care.

Salaberri and Aragón (2004) carried out a study in the North of Spain and found that caregivers' activities included helping with the bath (14%), domestic tasks (11%), and helping to go up stairs (9%). According to this study, the number of immigrant caregivers has increased, representing 39% of the population of Navarra, of which 86.10% originated from Central and South America, especially from Peru, Dominican Republic and Colombia. In the Valencian Community, 43.1% of the immigrants provide care services. According to the IMSERSO (2005), the activities that the elderly caregivers perform include helping with routine tasks (92.1%), domestic tasks (89.3%) and daily care (76.1%).

The immigration phenomenon

We understand that immigration is inevitable and has the potential to be very positive for the development and for poverty reduction. In this article, the immigration process is understood as the movement of people that go from a country to another, crossing one or more international borders (Moura, 2011).

The individuals that experience other cultures suffer diverse psychological changes, which is why it is proposed the expression acculturation for assigning the level of the psychological and individual dimension. According to the definition of Ramos (2008), it is possible to understand acculturation as an interactional dialectics in which two poles (leaving a country and arriving to another one to live in it) contribute to the occurrence of that osmosis, or for its possibility.

Dealing with human behavior in the cultural context, Berry (2001) expresses that all behavior is formed by the cultural situation inside which the individual was created and in which he lives. Berry affirms that when people are presented to other cultures, in particular during and after the trial of immigration, they face situations that challenge the sense of self. The identity questions that emerge depend on a range of factors as age, personal characteristics, the nature of the group of belonging, and the situations that are found in the new environment.

According to Ricardo and Castro (2003) for the immigrant, upon arriving to an unknown place, the feelings experienced are fear, shame, apprehension, nostalgia and the missing of the family base. In this sense, he needs to be adapted and integrated to the new culture, for that can fill the existing gap upon leaving his country of origin.

The differences between two societies generate a situation of acculturation that requires several forms of adaptation for new functions, and that should enable the achievement of the integration (Strey, 1998). According to Severino (1998), these relations established arouse the immigrants' feelings of solidarity, cooperation, and satisfaction to live in a group, developing their acquisition of knowledge, their values, their criticisms, besides the posture of facing life, contributing for their development and adaptation, quality of life and welfare.

For Cunha (2007), this process of acculturation and adaptation is completely overlapped with the process of globalization of the contemporary world that causes new time changes and interconnection of spaces and experiences never before imagined; those multiple combinations in the formation of new identities, as well as the representations of them, since identity to be deeply implied in the social representation.

The Theory of Social Representations (SR) and the immigration

Moscovici (1978, p. 65) defined SR as "a modality of private knowledge that has for function the elaboration of behaviors and the communication between the individuals... that are modeled in the individual/society interrelation". For him, the SR are symbolic/practical/dynamic sets whose status is of a production and not reproduction or reaction to exterior stimuli, but the utilization and the selection of information from the itinerant repertoire in the society, destined the interpretation and the elaboration of the real. Thus, to represent an object, person or thing consists not only in implanting, repeating or reproducing it, but in reconstructing, retouching and modifying it (Moscovici, 1984).

Immigration involves an entire network, representations, dreams, desires, needs, ambitions and projects of life for the human beings in their individual-collective experience. It is necessary to understand and to articulate the most diverse motivations to the migration process with the context in which they are built. Therefore, when it is a matter of knowing and understanding human life, we must perceive the phenomena in the interactions of the context in which they happen, seeking for their totality, but certain only of their approach, since everything is indefinable and unrecognizable (Patricio, 1999). The immigrant, upon living in a new reality, absorbs a process of mooring that transforms those rare and disturbing elements that he has found in a private system of category that is more appropriate for him (Ramos, 2008).

It is necessary to integrate the social and psychological dimensions of the migratory process. The habitual representations of migration experiences contain the moral and symbolic elements that intervene strongly in the phases of recognition of the migration process. This search for sense, inseparable of the identity to the individual and to the social actor, enters in all the attitudes and behaviors facing migration. According to Doise (1990), the utilization of the SR theory is very helpful since it is read as a conceptual mark that involves both the intrapersonal and the interpersonal and group levels of analysis.

It is possible to find a large quantity of works about the SR theory in Spanish and Portuguese language, given its popularization in Latin America and

its significant evolution in Brazil (Bertoldo, Bousfield, Justo, & Wachelke, 2011). Regarding immigration, some empirical researches have been carried out on the immigration SR. Lacalle (2008) verified that the Spanish television has attributed SR to the immigrant especially as a "problem" or a "source of concern". Lucena (2008) analyzed two Brazilian newspapers: *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Estado de São Paulo*, as well as two Spanish newspapers: *El País* and *El Mundo*. The author verified, in the Brazilian press, SR linked to social enclosure and exclusion, actions and reactions against the illegal immigration, histories and ways of life of the immigrant, multiculturalism and violence, institutionalization of the ethnic intolerance, work, job and unemployment.

In the Spanish press, the author verified SR linked to social imbalance, national immigration pact, actions against the illegal immigration, cooperation/ international tension, falsified identity and work, and seek for improvement of life. The author concluded that more negative attitudes facing the immigrant have been verified in the Spanish press. Franke, Coutinho and Ramos (2009), on the other hand, verified that immigration was represented by Brazilian immigrants living in Switzerland by words as "money", "work" and "escape" among men, and by "detachment", "discrimination" and "escape" among women. Jarvorski (2011) verified the SR of the immigrants in the program "Nós" of the Portuguese TV, concluding that in this program the immigrant is represented unlike the conventional media of that country, as someone that can increase in terms of social company. Martins and Silva (2011) analyzed videos posted by the Portuguese on the website YouTube about the Brazilian immigration. By means of the speech analysis, the authors verified SR that link the Brazilian immigrants to "unlawfulness" and "exploitation" but also to "joy", "tropicality" and "sensuality".

It is verified that the studies about the SR of the immigration or of the immigrants are scarce; others have focused on the SR in the media. Moreover, neither studies about health care and elderly caregivers SR have been found, nor studies considering the SR of the immigrant caregiver. Therefore, the objective of this research is to apprehend which are the SR of the elderly caregiver immigrants originated from Latin America and residing in the city of Valencia (Spain) about the constructs: immigration, health care and elderly caregivers with the elderly person. It is intended, this way, to contribute for the studies about immigration and care with the elderly person in a qualitative perspective based on the SR theory.

Method

Participants

The participants were 35 immigrants of different nationalities from Latin America, such as: Colombia (7 immigrants), Ecuador (5 immigrants), Bolivia (5 immigrants), Argentina (6 immigrants), Venezuela (2 immigrants), Peru (3 immigrants), Paraguay (2 immigrants), Mexico (4 immigrants) and Brazil (1 immigrant). They were contacted by means of the diverse agencies that offer courses for elderly caregivers in the city of Valencia (EVES - Escuela Valenciana de Estudios de la Salud de la Conserjería de Sanidad*;* and CeiMigra - Centro de Estudios para la Integración Social y Formación de Immigrantes, Foundación de la Comunidad Valenciana), and through the snowball sampling technique it was possible to contact with other elderly caregivers known for the first interview.

Instruments

A. <u>Social-Demographic questionnaire</u>. It had the objective of identifying personal details: gender, age, marital state, level of education, profession, and occupation.

B. <u>Word Association Test</u>. It had the objective of investigating the perception of the reality of a social group from the pre-existing semantic composition. This composition can be very concrete as well as imaginary, being organized amid some simple symbolic elements that replace or orient the objective information or the real perception to the object of study (Bardin, 2002). It permits the performance of an open research, in which the researcher emits one or more inductor stimuli and/ or evocative words in order to make the participant verbalize words related with the stimulus.

Procedure

The application of the Word Association Test was carried out individually, according to the model that is described below:

(a) After presenting the researcher and the objectives of the research, the researcher requested to each subject the evocation of some words associated to the three inductor stimuli: IMMIGRATION (stimulus 1); CARE (stimulus 2); CARE WITH THE ELDERLY PERSON (stimulus 3); (b) For the application of this instrument, the following questions were utilized: Stimulus 1 - "When I pronounce the word IMMIGRATION what comes to your mind? Write some words that you associate with IMMIGRATION".

Stimulus 2 - "When I pronounce the word CARE what comes to your mind? Write some words that you associate with "CARE"; Stimulus 3 - "When I pronounce the words CARE WITH THE ELDERLY PERSON what comes to your mind? Write some words that you associate with "CARE WITH THE ELDERLY PERSON".

The execution of the research was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, 25 students of some Elderly Caregivers Courses from EVES and from courses offered by the CEIMIGRA were approached with the purpose to obtain information about the quantity of immigrant students from Latin America that were carrying out the courses. With this information, the researcher initiated the visits to the classes and the immigrants were invited to participate of the research. The invitation was collective; at this moment, the objectives of the research were informed and the questions were answered. Those that wanted to freely participate informed their names and telephone numbers so that the researcher could be able to contact them and schedule the best day for their participation in the research.

In the second phase, 10 participants that were not taking the course were individually contacted. The meetings were in public places and the interviews were carried out individually. The participants answered the Word Association Test in an average time of 10 minutes. At the end of each interview, the researcher always requested the participants to indicate another elderly caregiver immigrant that was not carrying out courses at the moment, in order to invite them to participate in the research.

Data analysis

The assembly of answers to the social-demographic questionnaire was digitized in the statistical program *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS 18.0 for Windows), used for statistical description.

The data obtained through the Word Association Test were analyzed by means of the Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA), utilizing the software Tri-Deux-Mots (Cibois, 1998). This software is appropriate for the handling of open questions, closed and/or free association of words, highlighting the relations of appeal and exclusion between the representational components of the different groups, and giving evidence to the fixed variables (in columns) and the modalities or variables of opinion (in lines) which are, in turn, confronted and revealed graphically in the representation of the factorial plan.

Results and discussion

The results collected through the Social-Demographic Questionnaire provided the profile of the participants, including: nationality, genre, age, marital status, and the level of education of the immigrant caregivers.

Of the total of participants (N = 35), 20% were of Colombian nationality; 14.3% Ecuadorian; 14.3% Bolivian; 11.4% Argentinean; 5.7% Venezuelan; 8.6% Peruvian; 5.7% Paraguayan; 11.4% Mexican; and 2.9% Brazilian. The women represented 80% of the participants; the majority age group was from 29 to 39 years old; 48.6% referred that were married; 65.7% had secondary education.

The profile of these caregivers coincides with the one pointed in the study performed by the IMSERSO (2005), in which it was affirmed that the majority of the elderly caregivers in Spain are immigrants and women. They are the ones who provide the home social-sanitary services to the dependent elderly people. Spain, due to the cultural and historical bonds with the Latin American countries, is one of the favorite destinations of the workers that speak Spanish. Indeed, the most numerous collectives of immigrants comes from the Latin American continent, reaching 32.93% of the total, standing out among them the Colombian and the Ecuadorian nationalities (Secretaria de Estado de la Seguridad Social, 2006).

The results found through the Word Association Test permitted the Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA) of the evocation of the Brazilian, Mexican, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Venezuelan, Argentinean, Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Colombian participants who were living in Valencia city, facing the three inductor stimuli: *Immigration* (1); *Care* (2); *Care with the Elderly Person* (3). The data collected from these stimuli show the semantic variations organized in the spatial field, represented by two factors: Factor 1 (F1) and Factor 2 (F2).

The processed results indicated a total of 293 words; from which, 124 were distinct words as a result of the union of terms with same semantic performed by the software. Considering the assembly of these words, 21 involved the factorial plan of correspondence in accordance with the relative distribution of each one of them.
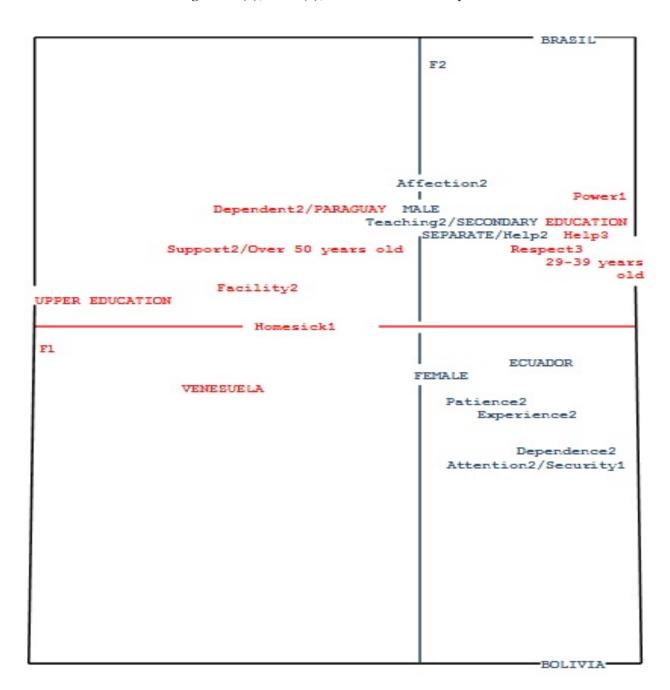
The participants of Colombian nationality contributed with 60 words (20.5%); of Ecuadorian nationality, with 59 words (20.1%); of Bolivian nationality, with 15 words (5.1%); of Argentinean nationality, with 35 words (11,9%); of Venezuelan

nationality, with 24 words (8.2%); of Peruvian nationality, with 7 words (2.4%); of Paraguayan nationality, with 41 words (14%); of Mexican nationality, with 25 words (8.5); of Brazilian nationality, with 27 words (9.2%). The female participants contributed with 198 words (67.6%) and the male participants, with 95 words (32.4%). The married participants contributed with 117 words (39.9%). The

participants with basic education contributed with 111 words (37.9%), and the participants aged between 40 and 49 years, with 127 words (43.3%).

The processing of the data originated Figure presented below, in which the semantic universes are represented associated to the genre, nationality, marital status, level of education and age.

Figure - Factorial Plan of Correspondence of the SR about immigration, care and care with the elderly person by the immigrant participants from Latin America that reside in the city of Valencia. F1 (positive axis): purple, horizontal; F2 (negative axis): blue, vertical. Inductor stimuli: Immigration (1); Care (2); Care with the Elderly Person.

The left-hand axis represents Factor 1 (F1), with a percentage of 24.7% of the total range of answers. On the horizontal part, in purple, are the grouped evocations of the immigrants of Paraguayan and Venezuelan nationality, with upper education, and over 50 years of age, which represented the stimulus 1: *Immigration* as: "nostalgia"; stimulus 2: *Care* as "facility, support, dependent" and stimulus 3: *Care with the Elderly Person* as: "Dependent person".

Following with Factor 1 (F1), but on the right-hand axis, on the horizontal part in purple, are grouped the evocations of the immigrants with secondary education, of Ecuadorian nationality, from ages between 29 to 39 years, which represented the stimuli: *Immigration* as "power", *Care* as "help" and *Care with the Elderly Person* as "respect". This SR of the immigration is positive, as expected, since the immigrants themselves are being represented, and it contrasts with negative SR divulged in the media (Lacalle, 2008; Lucena, 2008).

In the factor highlighted in blue (F2), on the vertical line and with a percentage of 17.8% of the total range of answers, represented on the upper field of the graph, are identified the evocations of the male caregivers of Brazilian nationality and marital status of separated. These participants represented the stimulus *Care* as "affection, education and help".

Following with the second Factor (F2), on the lower plan, in blue color, are represented the evocations of the female participants of Bolivian nationality, which represented the stimuli as it follows: *Immigration* as "security", *Care* as "patience" and *Care with the Elderly Person* as "experience".

Analyzing the semantic fields above, regarding the stimulus *Immigration*, for those immigrants of Paraguayan and Venezuelan nationality, with upper education and ages over 50 years, we can observe that immigration is represented with a feeling of "nostalgia". In this sense, Ricardo and Castro (2003) highlight the feelings that affect the immigrant upon arriving in an unknown and new place, emphasizing specifically the feelings of fear, shame, apprehension and nostalgia. They also emphasize the need of adaptation and integration to the new culture.

For the immigrants with secondary education, of Ecuadorian nationality, of ages between 29 to 39 years, *Immigration* was represented as "power". It is assumed that the difficulties of fighting against the initial isolation of the condition of foreigner, aggravated by the social vulnerability which they start to live with, drive the immigrant to transform the suffering in representations such as: "painful process", "leaving everything behind", "leaving the clear side and entering the dark side", "demands a lot of strength and courage". In this sense, Melman (1992) highlights that the suffering is generated by the abandonment that the immigrant feels due to the aspiration of being accepted in the country of adoption, and is reinforced by the experience of helplessness that causes pain and anguish, since their known references are devaluated.

Following with the second Factor (F2), the female immigrants of Bolivian nationality represent *Immigration* as "security". Bertonha (2000) affirms that the problems of the country of birth, its politics and debates, are completely forgotten by the ones who abandon it, since the big majority of immigrants, upon arriving to the new country, is more concerned in conquering economic security and surviving in the new reality. That is also related to the SR linked to job and unemployment (Lucena, 2008) as well as to money (Franke et al., 2009). Vala, Pereira and Ramos (2006), on the other hand, highlight that the immigration is typically analyzed either in the common sense, or in the media, in its economic and security dimension. The authors corroborated this assertion in their research.

Considering the elements that were evoked from the stimulus *Care*, in the Factor 1 (F1) evoked by the immigrants from Paraguayan and Venezuelan nationality with upper education, with ages over 50 years old, represent this stimulus as: "facility", "support", "dependent". Overall, the care is every action to promote and develop what does well for people and groups. Hence, Waldow (2004) affirms that care consists in the transpersonal efforts from a human being to another human being, in the sense of promote, support and help.

For the immigrants with secondary education, of Ecuadorian nationality, of ages from 29 to 39 years, *Care* was represented as "helping the other". The dependent elderly person can be seen as a defenseless subject, needing greater attention and help. Still according to Waldow (2004), the caregiver should be receptive and conscious of what it means to be patient, to be a caregiver, as well as to be sensitive to the fears, anxiety, and insecurity that the patient and its family can present. It is necessary to privilege the care process as a humanized structure, in which the deserving of care is the center.

In Factor 2 (F2), the male immigrants of Brazilian nationality represented *Care* as "act of affection, education and help". The immigrant caregivers recognize that affection is an important component of the act of taking care, expressed in the sense of affection and welfare.

The female participants of Bolivian nationality represented *Care* as "act of patience". The representation of this group corroborates what Zoboli (2007) affirms, that taking care is demonstrating patience, interest, respect, attention, comprehension and affection, is to be capable of answering the specific experiences of affiliation and suffering of the people that need to be attended by the caregivers.

Regarding the analysis of the Factor 1 (F1), the stimulus *Care with the Elderly Person*, for the immigrants of Paraguayan and Venezuelan nationality, with upper education, with ages over 50 years, was represented as "dependent person". The *Libro Blanco de la Dependencia* (Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2004) defines dependence as

> a state in which are found people that, by reasons connected to the absence or loss of physical, psychological or intellectual autonomy, have important needs of aid or help in order to carry out the current acts of the daily life and, in particular, regarding the personal care. (p. 15)

In Factor 2 (F2), the immigrants with secondary education, of Ecuadorian nationality, of ages from 29 to 39 years, represented the stimulus *Care with the Elderly Person* as "act of respect". This information also corroborates what Zoboli (2007) affirms about the care and the relation with the caregiver, related to the need of being always aware of the elderly person. Thus, the elderly care performed by immigrants represents an important resource of care. Regarding the female participants of Bolivian nationality, the stimulus *Care with the Elderly Person* was represented as "experience". It is indisputable the importance of the experience in the process of formation of the elderly caregivers; the experience is submitted to a reorganization, reconstruction and modification process of the caregivers' attitudes before the dependent elderly person.

Conclusions

This research was oriented with the objective of getting to know the SR about immigration, health care and care to the elderly person of native caregivers from Latin America. Immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Paraguay, Mexico and Brazil, resident in the city of Valencia-Spain, participated in order to help understanding how this phenomenon is built from the point of view that symbolizes it. It is expected that this study may contribute to a better comprehension of the specificities of the Latin American immigration.

It is highlighted as a main limitation of the present research, not being possible to count on a larger sample of immigrant participants. In addition, there was not an unbiased distribution of the nationalities. We counted, for example, with the participation of only one Brazilian immigrant. This situation would certainly have been different if there were less illegal immigrants from that country.

The theoretical structure that oriented the analysis to this research was the SR theory (Moscovici, 1978, 1984), which is fundamental to the comprehension of the constructions, structures and means that form part of the reality of the social actors involved. This theory reveals a plural dimension to the human associations, collective forces, knowledge, and routine acts in the heart of the society, or of a group of belonging. Such premises are presented as substantial theoretical support in this study.

Our critical perspective can be exemplified in the words of Lane (1988): "understanding the social representations implies to not only knowing the amplest speech, but also the situation that defines the individual who produces them" (p. 37). Our analysis was centered in the language, since, as Lane (1985) explains, it allows the elaboration of the social representations. In this perspective, social psychology defends the resolution of social problems. As highlighted by Lima, Ciampa and Almeida (2009), in this theoretical perspective, reality is not broken up. This critical perspective searches for social transformation, for decreasing the social inequalities that devastate the majority of the Latin Americans (Ferreira, 2010).

From a more macro point of view, it can be perceived that the social representation of immigration as security, force and power is consistent with the search for better economic conditions in contrast with the critical situation of Latin America that suffers with the unemployment, poverty and crime (Pellegrino, 2004; Solimano, 2009; Vala et al., 2006; Villareal, 2008). In addition, it is worth highlighting that, despite the problems of the native land, immigration is still represented as nostalgia.

By means of the participants' SR on the constructs above mentioned, a plurality of senses and meanings was identified, showing a diversity of ways to understand and explain them which, in turn, reflects the different forms of insertion of the immigrants in the society that received them. The present research has the intention to contribute empirically to the knowledge on the migratory phenomenon, as well as on the care to the elderly person. It is important, however, that new studies are carried out, comparing, for example, the SR of the immigrants with the SR of

the dominant group, of the society that received them. Other nationalities should also be considered, as well as the research on elderly people's SR in order to verify their quality of life. It is expected that the present study may offer a better comprehension of the Latin American immigrant population of caregivers in the city of Valencia, and that may evoke future researches.

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