



## IN TIMES OF COVID-19 ... THINK IN A SOCIAL KEY THE PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION IN HEALTH EN TIEMPOS DE COVID-19 ... PENSAR EN CLAVE SOCIAL LA INTERVENCIÓN PROFESIONAL EN SALUD

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### ABSTRACT:

Introduction: A reflection resulting from an exploratory study is presented through which the content of political-official and academic discourses was investigated, related to the imminent danger of the COVID-19 pandemic in the international context and the role that corresponds to professional intervention from the social and humanistic sciences. Objective: To reveal the units of meaning that characterized the predominant discourse, as well as to offer elements of analysis about the meaning and challenges of professional interventions in the field of human health. Theoretical research methods such as historical-logical, inductive-deductive and analysis-synthesis are applied. Content analysis was the main method selected to assess the meaning of the ideas that characterized the speeches. A search was carried out for the speeches related to Covid-19, by representatives of some governments and authorities of international organizations, giving priority to what was published in the Spanish language. Results: The results show the presence of ambiguity and disorientation in the political-official discourse studied and their neglect of the contributions of the social and humanistic sciences and exposes the challenges facing social interventions. Conclusions: The contradictory, inconsistent and underutilized treatment of the contributions of the social and humanistic sciences, which has characterized the official discourse of orientation to citizens regarding the incidence of COVID-19, does not contribute to the establishment of a democratic social behavior and aware of the need for self-care. It is a challenge of the first order to reconsider the contributions of the social sciences about how to influence behavior in situations like these.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, professional intervention, health, official speech.

### RESUMEN:

Introducción: Se presenta una reflexión resultante de estudio exploratorio a través del cual, se indagó acerca del contenido de los discursos político-oficial y académico, relacionados con el inminente peligro de la pandemia COVID-19 en el contexto internacional y el papel que corresponde a la intervención profesional desde las ciencias sociales y humanísticas. Objetivo: Develar las unidades de sentido que caracterizaron al discurso predominante, así como ofrecer elementos de análisis acerca del significado y los desafíos de las intervenciones profesionales en el ámbito de la salud humana. Se aplican métodos teóricos de investigación como el histórico-lógico, inductivo-deductivo y análisis-síntesis. El análisis de contenido fue el principal método seleccionado para valorar el sentido de las ideas que caracterizaron los discursos. Se realizó una búsqueda de los discursos vinculados con el Covid-19, de representantes de algunos gobiernos y autoridades de organismos internacionales, dando prioridad a lo publicado en idioma español. Resultados: Los resultados evidencian la presencia de ambigüedad y desorientación en el discurso político-oficial estudiado y la desatención de éstos a los aportes de las ciencias sociales y humanísticas y expone los desafíos que tienen ante sí las intervenciones sociales. Conclusiones: El tratamiento contradictorio, inconsistente y de subutilización de los aportes de las ciencias sociales y humanísticas, que ha caracterizado al discurso oficial de orientación a la ciudadanía respecto a la incidencia del COVID-19, no contribuye al establecimiento de un comportamiento social democrático y consciente de la necesidad de autocuidado. Constituye un desafío de primer orden, reconsiderar los aportes de las ciencias sociales acerca de cómo incidir sobre los comportamientos en situaciones como éstas.

**Palabras Clave:** Género, LGTBI, Sexualidad, Ámbito Laboral, Discriminación, Rechazo, Trabajo, Inclusión.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The established international order produces and reproduces the essence of capitalism: economically, the appropriation by fewer people of the greatest results; politically, the over-representativeness of the dominant interests of these same groups and ideo-cultural, alienation, reinforced by the demands of the information and communications society in its neoliberal version. An order, which teleologically and functionally, increasingly shows its inability to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

In Latin America, the most unequal region in the world, these are the circumstances in which most of the population has had to face the scourge of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, which places it in a high degree of vulnerability, and it has conditioned that the most negative impact has fallen on the most disadvantaged social groups. These are the arguments that require an analysis of health as a process and of the health situation in which Latin American peoples in particular live today, in the key of social commitment.

However, there is little evidence to the contrary. For example, the treatment given to this issue by the political-official discourse

(addressed in this research), both from the public and private institutions, has a contradictory, ambivalent and disorienting character in terms of the mobilizing influence of social action for the strengthening of responsible attitudes and behaviors towards health care.

The foregoing has been questioned by a group of thinkers, whose reflections are ascribed to the so-called social and humanistic sciences and who, although sharing diverse and even exclusive views about COVID-19, its causes, and consequences, contribute ideas that, unlike the habitual content of what circulates from the official-media discourse, helps to think.

Both views are subject to evaluation in this presentation, based on the premise that in scenarios like these, before the social sciences and in particular Social Work, the need for accurate interventions is imposed, aware of social problems and their causes, aimed at developing critical awareness in citizenship and projects that allow the transformation of reality in correspondence with the possible ideal.



### **Background or state of the art:**

The approach to this issue finds segmented expressions in existing publications. In the first place, because it is a strictly topical issue, in the process of development, which, apparently, has forced the intellectual community to wait, before expressing itself, for a greater maturation of the conditions in which the facts are they produce and reproduce. The second consideration is related to the very nature of the object, which, for the purposes of this presentation, articulates several elements of analysis, to say, COVID-19, the official discourse about it, its reflection from the social sciences and everything. This is articulated with the professional intervention required by the circumstances. This integrating nature of the proposal is not commonly found in the dissertations about the pandemic and these are the ones that dominate the social discourse published in relation to the subject.

However, the ideas that in relation to COVID-19, its causes, and consequences, can be found, both in the media, social networks or in specialized discourse are prolific. As part of the bibliographic review carried out, attention was focused on three types of

sources basically: the official discourse of the United Nations Organization (UN), the treatment that the press has made on the interventions of the main leaders of some countries and the reflections of social academics published in different media and compiled by the ASPO editorial.

In relation to the first, the center of the analysis revolved around the speeches made by the President of the UN, in which, on the one hand, one can appreciate the sanitary orientation about the protection measures that should be adopted by governments and citizens and on the other, the insufficient treatment of the social mediations of the pandemic.

The discourse of governments about COVID-19, specifically, of some presidents, has been the target of strong questioning, sometimes due to the lack of knowledge shown on the subject, others, due to the contradictions evidenced between the members of the government teams themselves or with the indications of international organizations specialized in health issues, as well as the obvious objective of manipulating public opinion that characterized some of them, all of which generated discomfort and disorientation among the recipients of these



messages. Among the countries involved in the analysis are the US, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Chile, Nicaragua, and Ecuador.

The study of reflections contributed by some social thinkers was especially useful, with in-depth analyzes about aspects that must be considered in times of pandemic to adequately influence the directionality of behaviors.

Although in the discourse analyzed, especially in that of academics, the need for responses by citizens, in terms of organized social action, to government policies of social control was addressed, this issue suffers from a specific approach regarding the assessment of the type of action, organization, its principles, methods and specific proposals.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Theoretical methods of scientific research were used, with emphasis on the historical-logical, inductive-deductive and analysis and synthesis. Content analysis was the preferred method for investigative treatment of written communications, mainly in the form of articles. Four speeches by the President of the UN, seven newspaper

articles from six countries containing speeches by top-level rulers, and seventeen scholarly articles published in different regions of the world were examined. The units of analysis used in the Boolean internet operators were: "discourses on covid-19", "social practices and interventions in the face of covid-19", "contradictions in the discourse on covid-19". The information was classified, the messages were categorized based on their content, and the coded data was analyzed qualitatively, which made it easier to verify the interests of the authors in relation to the discourse analyzed, interpret it and describe its particularities.

## **3. RESULTS**

The official discourse on COVID-19, which emanates from the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as from several governments of the region of the Americas, focuses its attention on technical-instrumental aspects associated with self-care, but not on those conditioning factors of the health problems that affect people today and the necessary substantive responses that States and international organizations should offer in relation to them.



Social thinking, in a pandemic stage in a special way, has made valuable contributions to the understanding of the nature of COVID-19, its causes and consequences, among which are:

- The essential characteristics of capitalism, those necessary for the reproduction of the system, especially neoliberal policies, constitute the main threats to human life, to say: economic growth, consumerism, mistreatment of the environment, extractivism, mass animal husbandry, agriculture toxics, deforestation, violence, inequitable distribution of wealth, among others.
- The health problems resulting from the harmful relationship between capitalism and inadequate lifestyles are reused by the system as mechanisms of social control, for example, states of exception, compulsory isolation, for the purpose of depoliticization, social fragmentation and increased inequity in favor of the most economically wealthy groups.
- It is advocated to build consensus on the implementation of social actions to condemn government practices that limit democratic freedoms and for the

development of effective proposals that allow subverting this situation.

- Criticism of unjust and inequitable health systems.
- A call for attention in relation to the possible post-pandemic effects on social relations, especially in the most vulnerable social groups: layoffs, the reduction of expenses in the States, the financial injection of large capital and the increases in external debts, However, the critical conscience around the contradictions that characterize the context, the solutions in political terms do not express the same degree of consensus, visualizing a range of positions that go from laziness to radical proposals passing through uncertainty.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The speeches of the President of the World Health Organization (WHO), since the beginning of the pandemic, have focused attention on the responsibility of governments and citizens in relation to health care, in what measures to adopt, However, they have not been sufficiently explicit in the analysis of the main conditioning factors that are at the base of



the health situation that prevails in the world population and consequently the indications refer to the phenomenological, not the essential.

In the case of governments, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of maintaining security measures and facilitating the solvency of their basic needs for the neediest groups (Guterres, 2020a and 2020b). Regarding the role of citizens, especially in the months between June and August 2020, the WHO has encouraged the alert so that security measures are not abandoned (Guterres, 2020c and 2020d).

These speeches do not make the necessary allusion to a set of contradictions underlying the emergence of the pandemic, its implementation in terms of equity and human rights, and they focus primarily on technical-health issues.

The position of the WHO has not been sufficiently supported by the official discursive practice of a part of the region of the Americas. In different countries there are contradictory approaches in communicative treatment about what to do and how to act, especially in the face of the

sustained prolongation of the pandemic and its multiple social effects.

Possibly, the clearest example of this is in the chronology of phrases related to COVID-19, pronounced by Donal Trump in the January-March period, captured, and recorded by Iñigo Sáenz de Ugarte (2020), in which it is clearly their triumphalism, ignorance of the subject, lies, irresponsibility, false self-sufficiency, arrogance and lack of control in relation to the health situation are visible.

Roberto Espíndola (2020), in the newspaper *El Heraldito de Juárez*, referring to the official Mexican discourse, stated that the response that the Federation and the States have offered to the crisis, about structural inequalities, as well as the demagoguery of the different parties and the confusing messages emitted by the state governments. For his part, Juan Bautista (2020), in *Voces del Periodista. Club de Periodistas de México*, refers to a set of contradictions associated with the handling of information.

On the Argentine site *INFOREGIÓN* (2020), about self-care in health, it was commented on the contradictions between the discourse and the ways of acting of governors, ministers, and the president himself, when,



on the one hand, they invited strict compliance with the measures and on the other, they appeared to be in breach of them.

The International Writing of EFE (2020), in a publication in May of this year, referred to visible disagreements in the Americas related to COVID-19. He alluded to the clash of statistics and change of speeches, among other aspects. Regarding Brazil, he pointed out the not profoundly serious position of its president, denying the seriousness of the situation, spreading jokes, while his spokesman tested positive for COVID-19".

Ecuador has been at the center of the communication controversy associated with the pandemic. From various media, incidents associated with certain institutional actions questioned due to their credibility or form of implementation and corresponding implications have come to light. From the beginning of the pandemic, the public information offered by the State, especially by the Ministry of Health, was questioned, because of contradictions in the data provided.

In another direction, goes the social academic discourse, which reflects serious

questions about the ways of coping with the pandemic at the international level.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, when interviewed by Mar Pichel (2020), from the BBC, states that the covid-19 pandemic functions as a pedagogue, which drastically indicates that it is time to stop, to reproduce the alienating conditions, to mistreatment of the environment and selfish social relationships that citizens have been forced to practice, where economic growth and consumerism fight against healthy lifestyles.

Jesús Alfonso Hernández Mena (2020) refers to the role of social sciences in their perception and projection of the current pandemic situation. In this line of thought, some authors pay attention to the fact that the pandemic has arrived at a time of accumulation of contradictions and large-scale social problems.

On the subject, David Harvey (2020), uses the following metaphor: "COVID-19 constitutes a revenge of nature for more than forty years of rude and abusive mistreatment at the hands of a violent and deregulated neoliberal extractivism". His analysis of the pandemic culminates in the recognition that it has been mismanaged by





governments, not only current ones, but also by the neoliberal logic of domination (p. 88).

Judith Butler (2020), in "Capitalism has its limits", raises a forceful criticism of the capitalist system and in a particular way, of the North American government health policy, due to its inequitable and unjust nature.

In relation to the unequal situation in Latin America and citizen insecurity, especially for women, Maristella Svampa (2020) pronounces. The alerts of María Pía López (2020) are important in relation to how to respond, what to do from the citizenry in the face of the operational modes instituted by the States and in this sense, she states: "In a pandemic situation, the idea of a necessary order prevails: Mandatory isolation requires the public will to abide by it, but also police control of traffic. Individual freedoms are suspended in the name of the common good" (p.73).

Slavoj Žižek (2020), incorporates into the analysis, the aspect related to the possible impact of the pandemic on the change of the political system. There are also those who express apathy in the struggle based on the premise that, although the social crisis

promoted by the system locked up in capital is unsustainable, there are no solutions designed from resistance and mobilization for change. This is the case of "Chronicle of psych deflation" by Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2020).

The questioning of sanitary measures has been at the center of not only academic debates. Giorgio Agamben (2020), in his reflection entitled "Contagion" warns about this: "It is possible, given the ethical inconsistency of our leaders, that these provisions are dictated to those who have taken them out of the same fear they intend to provoke, but it is difficult not thinking that the situation they create is exactly the one that those who govern us have repeatedly tried to realize: that universities and schools are closed once and for all and that the lessons are only given online, that we stop meeting and talking for political or cultural reasons and let us only exchange digital messages, that as far as possible the machines replace all contact - all contagion - between human beings" (p.33).

A prominent place in the assessment of the causes of the health situation in which the world lives, is occupied by the work, *The Pandemic Factory*, by Silvia Ribeiro (2020),





who systematizes findings on the main conditioning factors of pandemics today and with this, it facilitates the understanding of the existing situation and the corresponding actions to be undertaken.

Maristella Svampa (2020), is one of the authors who advocates organized social action in search of answers to the existing contradictions and argues that "there are opportunities for transformative action in the midst of disaster" (p.28). In this direction, emphasized María Galindo (2020), in her controversial and forceful essay "Disobedience, because of you I will survive."

In "The local is political" Lala Pasquinelli (2020), to the analysis of the causes of the health problems associated with COVID-19 that the world is experiencing, links the manipulation to which citizens are subjected by this all-powerful sector of the population, owner of wealth and offers some elements of how to deal with it. On the other hand, interesting is the analysis of Paul B. Preciado (2020), when referring to the biovigilance on our bodies and the deliberate decollectivization by some governments.

An essential contribution from the scientific-academic to the understanding of how interventions should be carried out in times of health emergency, made Jay J. Van Bavel, Katherine Baicker, Robb Willer, et al (2020), in their work "Social science and behavior in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic". These authors start from the premise that, in situations of this type, it is important to be able to align social behaviors with the health measures that guide specialized health institutions. His reflections are based on the logic of the necessary complementarity between the knowledge of the health sciences and those of the social and humanistic sciences to avoid errors that have harmful consequences for human development.

Among the issues that these authors address and that have not received the correct treatment at the level of social practice in the context of the current pandemic, are the appeal to fear with messages of little efficacy, that is, of possible effectiveness in the response, as a generator of depressive attitudes and behaviors; On the contrary, the so-called optimism bias, whose most common reaction to events such as covid-19, tends to be overconfidence and



disrespect for measures. The ideal, the authors refer, is to achieve a balance between both guidelines; The association between feeling greater fear and ethnocentric, intolerant, and punitive behaviors can be promoters of violence towards external groups, especially against groups subject to historical processes of stigmatization and discrimination.

Another idea is related to what the authors call the emerging sense of shared identity, which explains how in disaster situations people tend to cooperate, however, for this to happen, public communication must stimulate these sources, for example, using collective terms that encourage action for the good of others; Do not confuse physical distancing with social distancing.

The aspects referred to constitute important social issues to be considered by the various actors involved in the decision-making processes with an impact on people's behavior in situations such as covid-19 and are not always taken into consideration.

However, these substantive contributions, it is necessary from the social and humanistic sciences to give greater visibility to essential elements that must characterize

professional practices, especially in conditions such as those that our peoples live today.

Among the functions that should characterize social interventions in the current context, according to Rivero, (2011) can be considered: the critical social diagnosis, with a prospective and proactive approach; the design, implementation and evaluation of action systems aimed at the promotion, prevention and transformation of social problems and the circumstances in which they are generated; the promotion of the participation of individuals, groups, communities and institutions in the search for answers through life projects and social transformation, oriented towards development; contribute to the design of policies and social services aimed at satisfying needs and raising the quality of life of human beings.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The units of meaning that characterize the discourses under investigation express the interests of the wealthiest social groups, since they do not reflect the essential economic, political, and cultural conditions that are at the base of the main health



problems experienced by the broad majorities, so they can be classified as empty speeches of real content about the situation of COVID-19.

The contributions of thinkers from the field of social and humanistic sciences, about COVID-19, do recognize the essential causes of the health situation associated with the pandemic, making strong criticism, and holding the capitalist social order responsible, however, the interpellation of the Regarding this, it does not yet contain sufficient proposals in terms of viable alternatives, an inter-sectional and transdisciplinary approach.

Social interventions, as their object of analysis and practical incidence is the links between social needs and the actions of public policies and services, constitute spaces par excellence for the attention to the human health situation.

The approach that must characterize such practices must focus on the development of the critical, prospective, and propositional capacities of the subjects towards whom they are directed.

The object-subject of social interventions, in all situations, but especially in conditions of health crisis, must encompass both

individuals, in their groups or communities, and institutions. It is a bidirectional action: towards political and civil society.

Social participation aimed at transforming reality and emancipation and human dignity is an essential means that social interventions should use and promote.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To the institutions of social and humanistic sciences:

- Systematize, through inter-institutional and interdisciplinary projects, the theoretical and methodological contributions produced by science and academia related to the health situation associated with COVID-19, its contextualization in our region, as well as policies, modes of citizen action and professional intervention practices associated with the preparation of possible proposals.

To institutions of social sciences, governors, and directors of public institutions:

- Manage through various channels, the arrangement of meetings between academics and decision-makers of public policies, which facilitate the analysis and implementation of the proposals made by the social and humanistic sciences.



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