

Implications of Individualization, Risk and Reflexivity for Health and Illness in Contemporaneity

Implicações da Individualização, Risco e Reflexividade para a Saúde e a Doença na Contemporaneidade

Implicaciones de Individualización, Riesgo y Reflexividad para la Salud y la Enfermedad en la Contemporaneidade

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Abstract

Introduction: The effects generated by globalization, technological advances, gain in civil and political rights, empowerment of minorities and increase in global risks has made not only changes in the way people see, but also how they face and deal with the new challenges imposed. Within the contemporary society or “second modernization”, the flexibilization, neoliberalism and transnationalism have rearranged how people act economically, politically and socially.

Body of the essay: The change from the first modernity, characterized by an industrial social order, to the second modernity, was driven by the “reflexive modernization”. Many of the non-wanted outcomes from the new process are naturally global and it is not possible to predict, estimate or control their impact. As an effect of the fear and anxiety generated, the “health industry” has adopted strategies to make profits from risk. Another feature of the recent modernity is the ‘individualization’, a social change in which people are responsible to build their own lives, and

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events are results of personal choices, no longer seen as natural or inevitable. Furthermore, an increasing phenomenon called 'inverted quarantine', mass actions of self-protectionism, creates pretended illusions of individual solutions for threatening situations, stopping society to look forward collective solutions. Therefore, it results increase in disparities and social exclusion, also reflecting in the access to a decent public health assistance. Conclusion: the new forms of social interaction in all spheres has imposed a shift in the way of thinking and approaching the recent challenges in health.

Descritores: Public Health; Disease; Delivery of Health Care.

Resumo

Introdução: Os efeitos gerados pela globalização, avanços tecnológicos, ganho em direitos civis e políticos, o empoderamento das minorias e o aumento dos riscos globais não somente modificaram a forma como as pessoas vêem, mas também como elas encaram e lidam com os novos desafios impostos. Dentro da sociedade contemporânea ou "segunda modernização", a flexibilização, o neoliberalismo e o

transnacionalismo reorganizaram a forma como as pessoas agem economicamente, politicamente e socialmente. Corpo do ensaio: A mudança da primeira modernidade, caracterizada por uma ordem social industrial, para a segunda modernidade, foi impulsionada pela "modernização reflexiva". Muitos dos resultados não desejados desse novo processo são naturalmente globais e, portanto, não é possível prever, estimar ou controlar seu impacto. Como efeito do medo e da ansiedade gerados, a "indústria da saúde" adotou estratégias para obter lucro com os esses riscos. Outra característica da modernidade recente é a "individualização", uma mudança social na qual as pessoas são responsáveis por construir suas próprias vidas, e os eventos são resultados de escolhas pessoais, não são mais vistas como naturais ou inevitáveis. Além disso, um fenômeno crescente chamado "quarentena invertida", uma ação em massa do auto-protecionismo, cria ilusões pretensas de soluções individuais para situações ameaçadoras, impedindo a sociedade de buscar soluções coletivas. Assim, resulta no aumento das disparidades e exclusão social, refletindo também no acesso a uma assistência pública de

saúde decente. Conclusão: as novas formas de interação social em todas as esferas impuseram uma mudança na forma de pensar e abordar os recentes desafios na saúde.

Descritores: *Saúde Pública; Doença; Assistência à Saúde.*

Resumen

Introducción: Los efectos generados por la globalización, los avances tecnológicos, la ganancia en derechos civiles y políticos, el empoderamiento de las minorías y el aumento de los riesgos globales no sólo modificaron la forma en que las personas ven, sino también cómo se encaran y se ocupan de los nuevos desafíos. Dentro de la sociedad contemporánea o "segunda modernización", la flexibilización, el neoliberalismo y el transnacionalismo reorganizaron la forma en que las personas actúan económicamente, políticamente y socialmente. Cuerpo del ensayo: El cambio de la primera modernidad, caracterizada por un orden social industrial, para la segunda modernidad, fue impulsada por la "modernización reflexiva". Muchos de los resultados no deseados de este nuevo proceso son naturalmente

globales y, por lo tanto, no es posible predecir, estimar o controlar su impacto. Como efecto del miedo y la ansiedad generados, la "industria de la salud" adoptó estrategias para obtener beneficios con esos riesgos. Otra característica de la modernidad reciente es la "individualización", un cambio social en el que las personas son responsables de construir sus propias vidas, y los eventos son resultados de las elecciones personales, ya no son vistas como naturales o inevitables. Además, un fenómeno creciente llamado "cuarentena invertida", una acción masiva del auto-proteccionismo, crea ilusiones pretendidas de soluciones individuales para situaciones amenazadoras, impidiendo a la sociedad buscar soluciones colectivas. Así, resulta en el aumento de las disparidades y exclusión social, reflejando también en el acceso a una asistencia pública de salud decente. Conclusión: las nuevas formas de interacción social en todas las esferas impusieron un cambio en la forma de pensar y abordar los recientes desafíos en la salud.

Descritores: *Salud Pública; Enfermedad; Prestación de Atención de Salud.*

Introduction

The term society may be characterized as an economic, cultural and political infrastructure made up of people. This ever-changing term contributes and, at the same time, results from its interaction with the environment, with other societies and all the institutions created to rule them. As a result of the globalization process, the technological revolution, the gain in civil and political rights, the gender revolution and the increase of global risks, there has been a transformation in the way people see and respond to these changes in the environment, which now is seen globally, and within different communities. These interdependencies have emerged as a consequence of the 'second modernity', in which the increased flexibility, liberalization of market and heightened transnationalism have led to changes in social life, for both individual and family, within the community and also in the political, economical and institutional spheres⁽¹⁾. It is important to understand that the individual now possess essential role on the responsibility for his or her acts towards health maintenance and the politics contained in their lifestyle

represent aspirations of social movements.

Social life used to be organized in a collective lifestyle, in which the stronger determinant of social action was the beliefs and expectations of the family, community and religion. These institutions used to rule the individual's life, creating pre-conceived forms of an ideal "way of living", for example: have a good job, marry and raise your children. At this point, environmental issues were out of everyone's concern. However, as time passed, old familial and organizational structures were no longer appropriate to the modern world. In addition to the reasons stressed in the first paragraph, gender revolution, secularization, neoliberalism and the rise of science have contributed for this changing in the previous conceptions. The change from the first modernity, characterized by an industrial social order, to the second modernity was driven by the "reflexive modernization", term that was launched by three well-recognized sociologists (Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash)⁽²⁾ and which concept and aspects will be explored in this essay.

Body of the essay

Differently from the problems confronted by past generations, the worst problems the current society has to deal with are human made, for instance, the disastrous effects of the global warming, air-pollutants, terrorist attacks, food and water poisoned with chemicals, and world financial crises. These non-wanted outcomes are naturally global, they go beyond national boundaries therefore cannot be restricted to a local area or group. They have reached a level in which is not possible to predict, estimate or control their impact. As a result, a distinguishing feature of risks in the second modernity is the fact that they are coupled with a type of “systemic-reflexivity”. Human-kind has always tried to combat traditional threats to their lives, such as starvation, disasters and violence from enemies. However, the modern scientific rationality has created new more multifaceted hazards to control those threats, such as overcropping, increased use of pesticides and mass production of weapons. They are examples of some of the many types of reflexivity created by the emergence of new risks in the late modern era⁽³⁾. The perception of reflexivity for most of the environmental studies is the idea of a

green style of living and identity, being activist and daily practicing. It is becoming even more common to see people expressing their political or ecological beliefs when consuming products. Nonetheless, it has been questioned if reflexivity is enough to lead such new practices for a more sustainable environment, yet is a good beginning for taking responsibilities, making considerations and being precautions⁽²⁾.

There are tremendous risks in the modern society created by social and economic processes associated with industrialization. Danger is everywhere and many times is hard to see, for example: air pollution, radiation in the soil and pesticides in foods and chemicals in the water people consume. Thus, at the same time the ‘successful’ modernity is providing us comfortable and practical lives, it is ruining the environment we live and bringing back to people the effects of their consumerism habits⁴. Therefore, the second modernity has generated a ‘risk society’, in which hazards are everywhere and people have to tackle with the unintended results of their own actions. Nonetheless, as a consequence of the fear and anxiety generated, the “health industry” has employed

strategies to make profits from risk. The possible hazards have become an economic factor to be applied in the production of goods that can minimize those risks, such as air-pollutant and water filters and vitamin-enriched food⁵. Once again, science is turning towards the management of the problems itself creates.

Another feature of the recent modernity is the fact that people are now required to construct their own lives; this social change is called 'individualization'. People have to actively make their lives based on the possibilities that are available to them, and their decisions may bring inconvenient consequences, which are now regarded as a result of their choices, thus there has been a shift from the level of the 'inevitable' and 'natural' to the level of the personal responsibility⁽⁶⁾. Nowadays, for example, lifestyle represents a crucial predictor of good health, since even though medicine has improved in combating many diseases, its achievements in long-term illness has been modest⁽⁷⁾. From the perspective of the reflexive modernization, the individual is understood as an autonomous rational ego, who uses expert systems reflexively and are

responsible for calculating and managing risks. Furthermore, there is an increasing phenomenon, called 'inverted quarantine' caused by the mass actions of self-protectionism, in which society creates pretended illusions of individual solutions for threatening conditions, originating a mass complacency that stops people from looking for substantive reforms⁸. Consequently, it is predictable that this lack of motivation to solve problems, sometimes intended by privileged social classes, leads to an increase in disparities and social exclusion, also reflecting in the access to a decent public health assistance. Therefore, there is a complementary meaning for 'individualization', which is when individuals are excluded from pre-existing social relations and sources of social identity without a re-inclusion in a new social formulation⁽⁹⁾. This meaning can better exemplify health inequalities, in which there is a contradiction between the individualized society people are building and the ever-increasing class-based disparity in health. In a study of individualization of class identity and health conducted in a southern English city, it was found an inverted relationship between social class and

health, concluding that the more privileged the social class, the lower the rate of morbi-mortality

Conclusion

Finally, all the new forms of social construction, economic and political positioning has imposed a shift in the way of thinking and approaching the new challenges in health. The emergence of chronic illness has shown that individuals are more and more responsible for their own health, and this greater responsibility has reassigned health to be set as a goal, sometimes might be through consuming healthy products, consequently symbolizing status. This epidemiological transition reveal a significant change into reflexive modernity, where chronic diseases became leading causes of mortality due to the successful approach of the modern medicine, since there was a shift in the burden of infectious diseases towards long-term, manageable, rarely curable, illness. The panorama of the later modernity is much more complex, possibly due to the greater variety of risks that surround an individual and also the complexity of their disease process, which does not involve a pathogen anymore, but

involves his or her lifestyle and social determinants⁽⁷⁾.

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