



Aging, a contemporary social problem relevant to social science intervention from the perspective of family abandonment

El envejecimiento, un problema social contemporáneo pertinente para la intervención en las Ciencias Sociales desde el abandono familiar

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Abstract

The work raises a reflection on the aging process and how it affects social science interventions from family abandonment, this allows describing how productivity relationships, stereotypes, social representations and emotions show social judgments based on prejudices and imaginary that does not value the social contribution and accentuates the state of vulnerability. This research procedure is

proposed from the life history modality with a hermeneutical historical focus over a period of 2 years that describes the social and family crisis that aging faces as it is related to non-productivity, changes in roles and emotions that occur within the framework of the breakdown of family affective bonds, as well as lack of protection, exclusion and isolation, collecting information through 6 in-depth interviews and non-participant observation guides. Therefore, the reflection proposes describing how aging as a contemporary social problem influences social science interventions from family abandonment. Consequently, interventions in the social sciences must recognize aging as an element of transformation and change in the social and family context that consolidates processes based on social ties and representations.

Resumen

El trabajo plantea una reflexión frente al proceso de envejecimiento y como este incide en las intervenciones de las ciencias sociales a partir del abandono familiar, esto permite describir como las relaciones de productividad, los estereotipos, las representaciones sociales y las emociones muestran juicios sociales fundamentados por prejuicios e imaginarios que no da valor a la contribución social y acentúa el estado de vulnerabilidad. Este procedimiento de investigación se plantea desde la modalidad de historia de vida con enfoque histórico hermenéutico en un periodo de 2 años que describe la crisis social y familiar que afronta el envejecimiento al ser relacionado con la no productividad, cambios de roles y emociones que se dan en el marco de la ruptura de los vínculos afectivos familiares, así como la desprotección, exclusión y aislamiento, haciendo la recolección de información por medio de 6 entrevistas a profundidad y guías de observación no participante. Por tanto, la reflexión plantea describir como el envejecimiento como problema social contemporáneo influye en las intervenciones de las ciencias sociales desde el abandono familiar. Por consiguiente, las intervenciones en las ciencias sociales deben reconocer el envejecimiento como elemento de transformación y cambio en el contexto social y familiar que consolida procesos a partir de vínculos y representaciones sociales.

Palabras clave/ Keywords

Aging, intervention, social representations, linkages.
Envejecimiento, intervención, representaciones sociales, vínculos.

Introduction

The current condition of aging is of great concern in the Colombian context due to the increase in the abandonment of the elderly by their family nucleus because of the transformations in the dynamics and roles assigned from productivity that affect their status in modernity. Therefore, aging in the contemporary context faces a crisis at the social level articulated to the little or no productivity, likewise, it reflects a family crisis that denotes a burden that affects the dynamics, roles, status that influence the abandonment or exile and that poses challenges to the social sciences.

This situation in the social sciences poses in the family a scenario where the bonds as indispensable components to guarantee the full exercise of rights such as health, equality and development of the elderly are blurred. This exposes interventions in the family that attempt to affect the exclusion of the older adult in the community environment, based on discrimination and segregation. Thus, this scenario poses for the social sciences interventions that affect neglect, inattention and violation in aging (Ruvalcaba, 2005).

In this way, aging is experiencing a worrying situation to the extent that in different countries there is evidence of a high rate of abandonment and neglect (Esquivel & García, 2017). García, 2017), according to a study conducted by the National System for the Integral Development of the Family in Mexico in 2019 of 13 million elderly people 16% of this population is in a state of abandonment, lack of protection and isolation, a situation that alters family dynamics and requires new forms in the intervention of social sciences (Valdivia, 2016), (Barros-Bastidas & Gebera, 2020). Similarly, according to a study conducted by the National University of Central Peru in the District of Viques, 67.5% of family members do not contribute to the protection and emotional or economic support of the elderly, a situation that accentuates the social representations regarding the aging stage of people, making this population group highly vulnerable.

Likewise, according to the indicators of the Ministry of Social Protection (2010), in Colombia there were 45 509 584 inhabitants, of which approximately 4 459 784 are over 65 years of age and 8% of this population is in a situation of family abandonment. This represents for the field of social sciences a challenge in the intervention of the family that allows providing answers to the demands and needs of a vulnerable population such as the elderly (Amarís & Arrieta, 2012).

Thus, the constant accompaniment and care that the family should provide during the aging process is a right and a duty for both parties, considering that it is part of the dignity of old age. However, the contemporary reality denotes the rupture of affective family ties and reflects that the older adult is in a state of loneliness, abandonment and vulnerability, allowing to have an overview of the role played by the nuclear family, to the extent that it is considered the main entity of protection and support of individuals.

Similarly, the incidence of the economic and emotional factor in aging, providing relevant contributions that denote a broad panorama regarding the rupture of affective family ties and changes. Likewise, it is suggested that the devaluation of aging is permeated by historical and cultural evolution, prejudices and stereotypes rooted in society (Vélez, 2009).

From the above, the need arises to delve into aging, mainly to know and describe how social science interventions affect the decrease in family abandonment. This allows identifying aspects related to productivity, social representations, bonds and emotions (Valdivia et al., 2016), related to contemporary problems of the social sciences.

Therefore, the study focuses on trying to describe aging in order to determine how social science interventions in the field of the family discourage the abandonment of the elderly and move towards the regasification of old age. In this sense, the research group reflects on the following questions: How is aging approached by the social sciences from the point of view of family abandonment?

Finally, the relevance of this reflection on aging poses the social sciences to structure interventions that reduce vulnerability in the family scenario. In such a way that it can understand the capacity to transform and change social representations.

Materials and Methods

The research process is descriptive in nature, since it intends to know and determine how aging is approached from the social sciences from the institutionalized family abandonment in the Remanso de Paz Foundation located in Soacha. In this way, this institution is taken as a reference due to the latent realities in the stage of aging in the abandonment of the elderly.

It is a non-profit entity, which houses older adults who are in a state of family abandonment, currently there are 16 institutionalized older adults in an age range of 65 to 78 years, where the main objective of the entity is to provide protection and shelter to the elderly who are in a state of abandonment.

Thus, the study allows obtaining information on the experiences and perceptions of older adults regarding interventions from the social sciences (Abreu, 2012). This allows to know and determine the incidence of economic, emotional and cultural factors in family abandonment for the description of the results obtained from the experience.

On the other hand, the approach used in this research is the historical hermeneutic approach, which is used to understand situations, contexts, particularities, symbologies, imaginaries, meanings and perceptions (Ortiz, 2011). In this way, it made possible the understanding, interpretation and identification of the internal motives of human action in the face of the problem of aging that is manifested in the abandonment of the elderly by their relatives in the Remanso de paz foundation (Rueda, Ríos & Nieves, 2009).

Likewise, this approach facilitates the understanding of a phenomenon through the experiences of individuals, which provides the necessary elements to construct meaning based on the perception of the older adult, where the subjective aspect was valued in the process of knowledge construction.

Thus, the sample was filtered through the implementation of 23 surveys to the elderly population of Soacha belonging to the Remanso de paz Foundation, from which 6 elderly people were selected who had as characteristics family abandonment, emotional problems and interventions in social sciences.

Finally, for the collection of information, 6 in-depth interviews were conducted with older adults in an age range of 70 to 80 years old, institutionalized in the Remanso de Paz Foundation in a condition of family abandonment, who were selected according to: age group, time of the scenario and feasibility of the research study, during the development of the in-depth interview, non-participant observation was implemented in order to understand the perception and experience of the participants in the face of abandonment.

Results

Consequently, it is evident in the life histories that people between 60 and 65 years of age have greater difficulty in finding employment, with the productive factor being one of the most marked problems in the aging stage (Hernández, 2009). This poses a challenge for the social sciences in relation to the recognition of skills and abilities that activate productivity in aging, since institutionalized older adults do not have the economic income to meet their needs and consequently face a social crisis as they are configured within a framework of unproductivity and burden for their families.

Aging brings problems in the family environment, since at the end of their active life they are seen as an economic burden (Núñez, Hernández, González, Quintero & Escalona, 2014). This is manifested in the discourses of the 6 life stories when they reflect discrimination and rejection due to the loss of productive capacities or not having the possibility of contributing income to the family dynamics. Therefore, this leads to the rupture of the affective family interaction, so that the older adult does not have the inputs for physical, emotional and economic self-valence (Cabrera, 2013).

As evidenced in the Remanso de Paz Foundation, where 5 of the 6 older adults state that one of the reasons why they are in absolute family abandonment is the lack of economic income to meet their needs. This leads the social sciences to reflect on how to structure interventions that can position the elderly in productive life (Rodríguez, 2008).

On the other hand, it is possible to understand that social representations have a direct influence on the neglect and lack of family protection towards the elderly, to the extent that the culture adopted by contemporary society does not consider the elderly person as an example to follow or as an individual with experiences, knowledge and capabilities (Toledo, 2011). This panorama poses a challenge to the social sciences on how to fit aging in an industrialized, productive world, that is, in the social machinery that reflects respect and protection for the elderly (Zavala, Vidal, Quiroga & Klassen, 2006).

Consequently, the research shows that the older person is socially stereotyped to the extent that there is no favorable and accurate definition of old age, which is limited to a framework of labor productivity without considering the potential, knowledge and social

role of the older population (Vélez et al., 2009). Life histories face social segregation, since they are considered isolated in family and social scenarios, economically dependent and with a decrease in status (Méndez, 2012). Therefore, the influence of contemporary social perception in the family abandonment of the institutionalized elderly individual in the Remanso de Paz Foundation is evidenced.

On the other hand, the research showed that social science interventions in the neglect of the elderly are permeated by the transformation in the conceptualization that takes place in the life cycle of longevity (Vélez et al., 2009), since the changes that have been generated in the course of time with respect to the concept of the elderly have varied. According to the accounts, these changes were evidenced in the value of their grandparents and parents in society, where they were considered a being of wisdom, knowledge, an extraordinary being worthy of admiration and respect, as well as, the family of this population was the first entity of protection, care and support of the older adult (Méndez, 2012).

However, as stated by the older adults interviewed, this concept has been transformed and is increasingly distant from what was believed a few years ago, since it has gone from having a positive to a negative evaluation (Vélez et al., 2009). On the other hand, the conceptualization of this has become a social construction influenced by stereotypes, self-stereotypes and prejudices, related to the chronological, biological or health, psychological or emotional and sociological or community (Rello, Bravo & Plata, 2018).

Likewise, these beliefs that are rooted in the collective imaginary are in turn supported by cultural situations such as the country's neoliberal system and the predominance of the dialectic of production, as well as, power relations, which are determining many dimensions of the meaning of aging and of the actions that are aimed at guaranteeing rights, ensuring well-being and dignified living conditions (Klein, 2018).

That is to say that, according to the older adults of the Remanso de paz foundation, the main perspectives from which social science interventions on aging are currently intended are biased and emphasize a lacking, unproductive, dependent and incapable state (Vélez, 2009). This results in a decrease in the social and family valuation of aging, one of the reasons why today the family no longer appears as the main entity of protection and family ties are blurred as

indispensable components to guarantee the full exercise of rights (Fernández, 2009).

On the other hand, the reflection on family dysfunctionality as a psychosocial factor that indexes aging, since this problem is influenced by the lack of affective bonds and relationships within the family (Chande, 2000). These elements are relevant for the structure of interventions from the social sciences.

Then, it is important to highlight that in one of the relevant results in the research procedure is to be able to identify the relationship between social representations and intervention in the social sciences, showing a reciprocity in the stereotypes in front of aging, this characterized by a framework of mutual correspondence in front of the evasion of responsibilities to the older adult in the family environment (Klein, 2018). That is, in their role as parents, older adults did not fulfill their legal obligations or were not present in the lives of their children, generating a rupture in the filial relationship generating detachment (Cardona & Peláez, 2012).

Therefore, in the life stories it was possible to identify generational conflict and affective bonds as an influential factor due to the fact that in an adult stage the children were involved in the couple's problems with the purpose of generating cohesion of alliances, this caused the son to create rejection, hatred and to move away from him in the aging stage (Klein, 2018). Therefore, in aging is framed in the family context in the life histories of the present study changing forms of cohabitation according to the evolutionary cycle and the generational role that converges in aging (Valdivia, 2016).

Finally, the life histories are framed in the abandonment of the older adult in the family context, the scenario of social science intervention, to the extent that the family fails to adapt to the implementation of new limits, hierarchical systems, roles and rules, communication patterns that break stereotypes and transform social representations in aging. Consequently, social science interventions determine a set of variations and deteriorations at the functional, morphological, and psychological level in the elderly person, which leads to emotional imbalance and a period of crisis in the family (Amaris & Arrieta, 2012).

This raises a reflection on how social science interventions in the aging stage conceive production relations in the valuation of aging as a non-useful and productive stage by which many older adults are in a state of family abandonment, since they are immersed in a social judgment

process (Núñez, Hernández, González, Quintero & Escalona, 2014). Therefore, in the contemporary context, aging does not fit into the productive sphere and consequently they face a family crisis that denotes the rupture of affective bonds, neglect and abandonment, being the scenario of intervention of the social sciences.

According to the above, productivity relationships impose a meaning, readjustment and change in aging, to the extent that this event is generally considered as negative for family and social scenarios (Herrera, 2008), since the evolutionary cycle of the family does not foresee the changes and the conjunctural problems, generally of an economic nature that an older adult enters. Therefore, the social sciences must identify the contemporary family dynamics that limit and blur the status and role of the older adult in a framework of productivity (Mondragón, Santamaria & Izaola, 2015).

On the other hand, it is worth noting that other research on the culture adopted by contemporary society and its influence on abandonment is influenced by stereotypes and prejudices that generate conceptions of aging in relation to discrimination and all kinds of violence (Vélez, 2009). Consequently, the devaluation of the social image limits an adequate integration of aging in the family and social environment (Toledo, 2011).

Therefore, contemporary culture generates new family structures that use stereotypes and negative beliefs about aging, where the challenge of social sciences is to promote family dynamics that ensure the well-being of the elderly (Colombo, Angarita, Gatto, Bessolo, Calderón, Miranda & Veiga, 2013). However, the social sciences should not only be concerned with the older adult population, but also with generating conscious actions in young people regarding the aging process in order to transform stereotypes beyond the productive (Valdés, 2012).

The problem of abandonment of the elderly is largely due to the transformation of the concept of the person in the longevity cycle. This raises a reflection on the conceptualization of the elderly from a broad and general worldview, where the influence of perceptions, conceptions and assessments on aging is evident from different disciplines such as biological, socioeconomic and sociocultural (Mondragón, Santamaria & Izaola, 2015).

According to the above, from the biological approach, the conceptualization of the older adult is based on the organic and cellular deterioration of an individual in the evolutionary stage

(Lozano, 1999). In other words, there is no close correspondence between some biological events and chronological age, but rather it is something of a genetic and hereditary nature.

However, the elderly and aging cannot be conceptualized assuming that the biological character cannot be changed or that it is an ahistorical process, but that the influence of man's relationship with nature must be contemplated (Cardona & Peláez, 2012). Thus, the conceptualization of the elderly ceases to be an element linked purely to the biological and becomes a cultural construction that is influenced by the historical situation at different times by segregation, exclusion and isolation (Martínez, Polo & Carrasco, 2002).

Likewise, the conceptualization of the elderly, being a cultural construction, is influenced by stereotypes and prejudices (Vélez, 2009). This poses a relationship with the chronological, biological and psychological, leaving as a central axis the inability of the elderly to adapt to the social system, the structure of society and its production structure, reducing the social and family valuation of old age.

On the other hand, the socioeconomic approach suggests that it is not possible to conceptualize the older adult to the extent that he or she is no longer useful in terms of work, since in countries such as those of Latin America many older adults have to continue working due to high poverty rates (Lozano, 1999). In this sense, the factor that most influences the abandonment of the older adult and that should be of interest to the social sciences is the emotional factor (Toledo, 2011), since the rupture of family relationships, as well as the absence of the older person within the family nucleus leads to a mutual correspondence, generating an evasion of responsibilities.

However, not only the conflictive family relationship influences, but also the family cycle of the empty nest, where the children of older adults decide to migrate to other places in order to generate a better quality of life for their families (Klein, 2018). This raises characteristics where the older adult is mostly the one who pushes people away, since, when he/she reaches the cycle of longevity when establishing contact with other people is hostile, aggressive, evasive and apathetic, which causes this social isolation and the deterioration of social and family relationships (Rello, Bravo & Plata, 2018).

Finally, the indifferent parent-child relationship is a factor that significantly influences the abandonment of the older adult, given that, in this sense, the family feels that the older person is a burden and

therefore proceeds to make decisions and take actions such as institutionalizing or simply abandoning him/her (Toledo, 2011).

Conclusions

Therefore, family abandonment in the aging stage is a reality that reflects the state of vulnerability and lack of protection in which older adults find themselves and is of great interest to the social sciences, since in the contemporary context, transformations in social and family dynamics are evident. In which, professionals provide tools to face family crises and reflect a role in the transformation of aging that positions beyond the role, links and status of this population.

Likewise, the social sciences must provide tools to face the social crisis at the moment when productive relationships come to an end, since discrimination and segregation are evident, emphasized in stereotypes and prejudices that point to the elderly from a framework of non-productivity, being socially considered as economically dependent, non-propositional and vulnerable persons.

As a consequence, family dysfunctionality is a psychosocial factor that is an index in the abandonment of the elderly, since this problem is influenced by the lack of affective bonds and relationships within the family. The social sciences must have the capacity to identify the transformation in the coexistence in the evolutionary cycle of longevity.

Finally, the social sciences should, through their interventions, influence social representations of aging and not only relate it to the productive context but also go beyond it in the recognition of an accumulated knowledge and the possibility of reconfiguring a social status within the framework of experiences, of an accumulated knowledge that allows for strengthening in the family and social scenario.

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