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Cultural aspects regarding public health

It is often perceived that cultural aspects represent a limitation which must be considered when regarding the development and implementation of public health intervention activities is often perceived, usually because there are varying degrees of difficulty concerning relationships, communication and understanding between communities and experts in this particular field.

Nevertheless, different social groups' beliefs and practices still survive and carry great force when addressing the various issues of interest regarding public health, as shown by the articles in this issue of the journal on such issues as cardiovascular risk factors, smoking and alcohol consumption, breastfeeding, physical activity, health service access, nutrition, healthcare team-patient-family relationship or implementing specific risk eradication, control or mitigation actions.

However, there is relatively little public health-related information concerning how this issue can be understood and addressed, possibly because consensus is still lacking between sociologists and anthropologists working in the healthcare field.

It would thus seem clear that more research is needed in this field, so that, while advances have been made regarding a situational description, advances should also be made in constructing diagnostic and intervention methodologies which would be truly accessible to those who (without being experts on this topic) are taking on the operational work amongst communities, so that cultural matters cease being a barrier and become rather an opportunity for the collective reconstruction of knowledge and practice regarding public health

It may be realistic to consider formal and informal regulatory aspects, a sense of identity and belonging to a particular group and implicit or explicit power and control mechanisms incorporated into a group of interest's everyday life as themes and possible starting points for such an approach. It is thus important to approach how these aspects are expressed in the home, jobs and public spaces (i.e. the three major areas of modern life) and as embodied in speech, language, customary practices, relationships and social organisation.

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