Cultura de paz en estudiantes universitarios: una mirada a través de la teoría de representaciones sociales

Culture of peace in university students, a look through the theory of social representations

Cultura de paz em estudantes universitários, um olhar pela teoria das representações sociais

Rocío Calderón García
Universidad de Guadalajara
rocio.cgarcia@academicos.udg.mx
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0716-3446

Jorge Alfredo Jiménez Torres
Universidad de Guadalajara
consultoria3201@hotmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7130-7451

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es explorar el significado de la cultura de paz en estudiantes universitarios. Para dicho propósito se presenta un acercamiento de la teoría de las representaciones sociales con la intención de explicar cómo los individuos se apropian de la información y la transforman en una forma de acción dentro de una colectividad, en busca del respeto hacia los derechos humanos ante un ambiente de paz. La investigación se llevó a cabo con una muestra de 112 informantes del Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de los programas educativos Sociología y Relaciones Internacionales, así como de la carrera de Abogado del Centro Universitario de la Ciénega, ambos campus de la Universidad de Guadalajara, México. Este objetivo se abordó a través de una metodología mixta, mediante las técnicas observación, análisis de documentos y listados libres. Los resultados revelaron que la concepción en torno al concepto *cultura de paz* es amplia y multidimensional. Por ejemplo, entre los principales valores se destacan

tolerancia, el respeto y la diversidad como pilares fundamentales de la cultura de paz. Es esencial comprender cómo estos jóvenes perciben, valoran e interpretan este fenómeno social, ya que esto proporciona información para diseñar estrategias efectivas y significativas de intervención y promoción de la cultura de paz para este grupo de personas.

Palabras clave: cultura de paz, estudiantes universitarios, representaciones sociales, educación superior.

Abstract

The culture of peace has acquired significant importance today. It is interesting to study how university students represent and understand this concept since it has an impact on their future development and on society in general. The objective of this article is to explore the meaning of the culture of peace in university students. For this purpose, an approach to the theory of Social Representations is presented with the intention of explaining how individuals' appropriate information and transform it into a form of action within a community, in search of respect for human rights in the face of a situation. peaceful environment. The research was conducted with a sample of 112 informants distributed in the University Center of Social Sciences and Humanities of the educational programs of Sociology and International Relations and the Law career of the University Center of la Cienega, both campuses of the University of Guadalajara., Mexico. It was approached through a mixed methodology using observation, document analysis and free lists as techniques. The results revealed that the concept of culture of peace by the study participants is broad and multidimensional. Among the main values, tolerance, respect, and diversity stand out as fundamental pillars of the culture of peace. It is essential to understand how these young people perceive, value, and interpret this social phenomenon, as this provides information to design effective and meaningful intervention strategies and promotion of a culture of peace for this group of people.

Keywords: Culture of peace, university students, social representations, Higher Education.

Resumo

A cultura da paz adquiriu grande importância na sociedade atual. Em particular, é interessante estudar como os estudantes universitários representam e compreendem este conceito, uma vez que tem impacto no seu desenvolvimento futuro e na sociedade em geral. O objetivo deste artigo é explorar o significado da cultura de paz em estudantes universitários. Para tanto, é apresentada uma abordagem à teoria das Representações Sociais com o intuito de explicar como os indivíduos se apropriam da informação e a transformam em forma de ação dentro de uma comunidade, em busca do respeito aos direitos humanos diante de uma situação pacífica. ambiente. A pesquisa foi realizada com uma amostra de 112 informantes distribuídos no Centro Universitário de Ciências Sociais e Humanas dos programas educacionais de Sociologia e Relações Internacionais e da carreira de Direito do Centro Universitário de La Ciénaga, ambos campus da Universidade de Guadalajara., México. Foi abordado através de uma metodologia mista utilizando observação, análise documental e listas livres como técnicas. Os resultados revelaram que o conceito de cultura de paz pelos participantes do estudo é amplo e multidimensional. Entre os principais valores destacam-se a tolerância, o respeito e a diversidade como pilares fundamentais da cultura de paz. É essencial compreender como estes jovens percebem, valorizam e interpretam este fenómeno social, pois isso fornece informações para desenhar estratégias eficazes e significativas de intervenção e promoção de uma cultura de paz para este grupo de pessoas.

Palavras-chave: Cultura de paz, estudantes universitários, representações sociais, Ensino Superior.

Introduction

In recent years, a growing interest has emerged in the topic of the culture of peace, even in the educational field (Ble Acosta and Cornelio Landero, 2023), since it has been considered that the university community should be sensitized about these topics. to seek to foster an environment of respect, harmony and tolerance (Delgado Cardona, 2023; Faro Democrático, 2023). Therefore, this article analyzes how university students understand and conceive the culture of peace through the approach of social representations proposed by Moscovici (1976), which facilitates the understanding of how individuals construct meanings and collective representations on issues. specific.

Previous studies related to the culture of peace in university students have highlighted the importance of promoting values such as tolerance, solidarity and respect as fundamental pillars for the development of a more just and peaceful society. This is due to the environment of increasing violence in which students live this stage of their lives (Godoy Usuga , 2023). For example, the work of Gómez *et al* stands out . (2016), who developed research to analyze the social representations of university students about the culture of peace. In their methodology, they implemented the focus group technique and focused on analysis categories such as peaceful conflict resolution, coexistence in diversity, and the construction of a more egalitarian society. This study provides deep insight into how university students perceive and understand the culture of peace in their environment.

The data results revealed that those students whose careers incorporated content on human rights and social justice had more solid representations and commitment to the culture of peace. Additionally, empirical evidence is offered on the importance of education in promoting a culture of peace among university students.

A notable element in the research consulted on this topic is that they have demonstrated its importance in understanding this phenomenon. The research of Gómez *et al* . (2016) offer a broad vision of how university students perceive and understand this concept in their environment. In addition, they highlight the relevance of education, academic training and the current political and social context to promote a culture of peace.

An approach to the theoretical framework on social representations

Social representations, a theory within social psychology, support their contribution to the sciences by exploring how people understand or appropriate their environment, as well as how they transmit that information, as mentioned by Domínguez Gutiérrez (2020) in his studies on representations. social relations of university students regarding science. One of the main exponents of this theory is Serge Moscovici who points out that social representations "deal with a specific type of knowledge, expressing it as a form of knowledge, socially elaborated, shared by the group, which has an orientation towards practice and , therefore, oriented to the construction of a social reality" (p. 3). In other words, it is important to consider that social representations are dynamic sets in which behaviors and relationships with the environment are produced dynamically (Moscovici, 1979), and this action modifies both (relations and behaviors), which makes the information in an object and fixes it to a shared social meaning (Valencia, 2023).

Therefore, when studying shared social construction, the discussion about whether this process has a scientific rank is relevant. In this regard, Domínguez Gutiérrez (2020) suggests that it is possible to give this scientific connotation because "everything contributes to making science an integral part of our vision of daily life" (p. 51). Therefore, the essential thing about this theory is to understand the notion of social reality and its construction process.

For this reason, Moscovici studied "how people construct and are constructed by social reality and based on his elaborations he proposed a theory whose object of study is the knowledge of common sense focused from a double perspective: from its production on the social and intellectual level. and as a form of social construction of reality" (Banchs , 1986, cited by Caniuqueo , et.al. , p. 105). That is, social representations are cognitive constructions that people use to make sense of their social environment and develop a shared understanding with other members of their society. According to Moscovici, these differ from individual representations, since they are influenced by the cultural and social context in which they are found.

A fundamental aspect of the theory of social representations is the idea of objectification. On this, Moscovici argues that social representations are formed through a shared process of objectification, in which abstract ideas and concepts become concrete symbols and categories that can be shared and communicated between members of a community. Furthermore, the aforementioned author proposes the existence of two types of social representations: objective and intersubjective. The former refer to how objects and events are presented in the physical environment, while the latter have to do with how individuals interpret and give meaning to these objects and events in the social environment.

In building a solid theoretical framework of the social representations approach, it is crucial to consider the various perspectives and theoretical contributions of other researchers in the field. Some scholars have expanded and refined Moscovici's theory with contributions of new ideas and concepts. An example of this is the work of Denise Jodelet, who has studied the influence of social representations in the construction of individual and collective identities. Another notable author is Gerard Duveen , who has explored the socio-cognitive functions of social representations and their importance in the formation of social reality.

Now, when using the social representations approach proposed by Moscovici, it is essential to take into account the criticisms and controversies that have arisen around this theory. Some, for example, argue that this approach may place too much emphasis on the influence of culture and society in the construction of social representations, thereby neglecting the role of individual cognitive processes. Therefore, building a solid theoretical framework of the social representations

approach proposed by Moscovici involves the integration of its main concepts, such as objectification and objective and intersubjective representations, with the contributions of other researchers in the field. By considering the criticisms and controversies, a more complete and enriching understanding of this theoretical approach to the study of social psychology can be obtained.
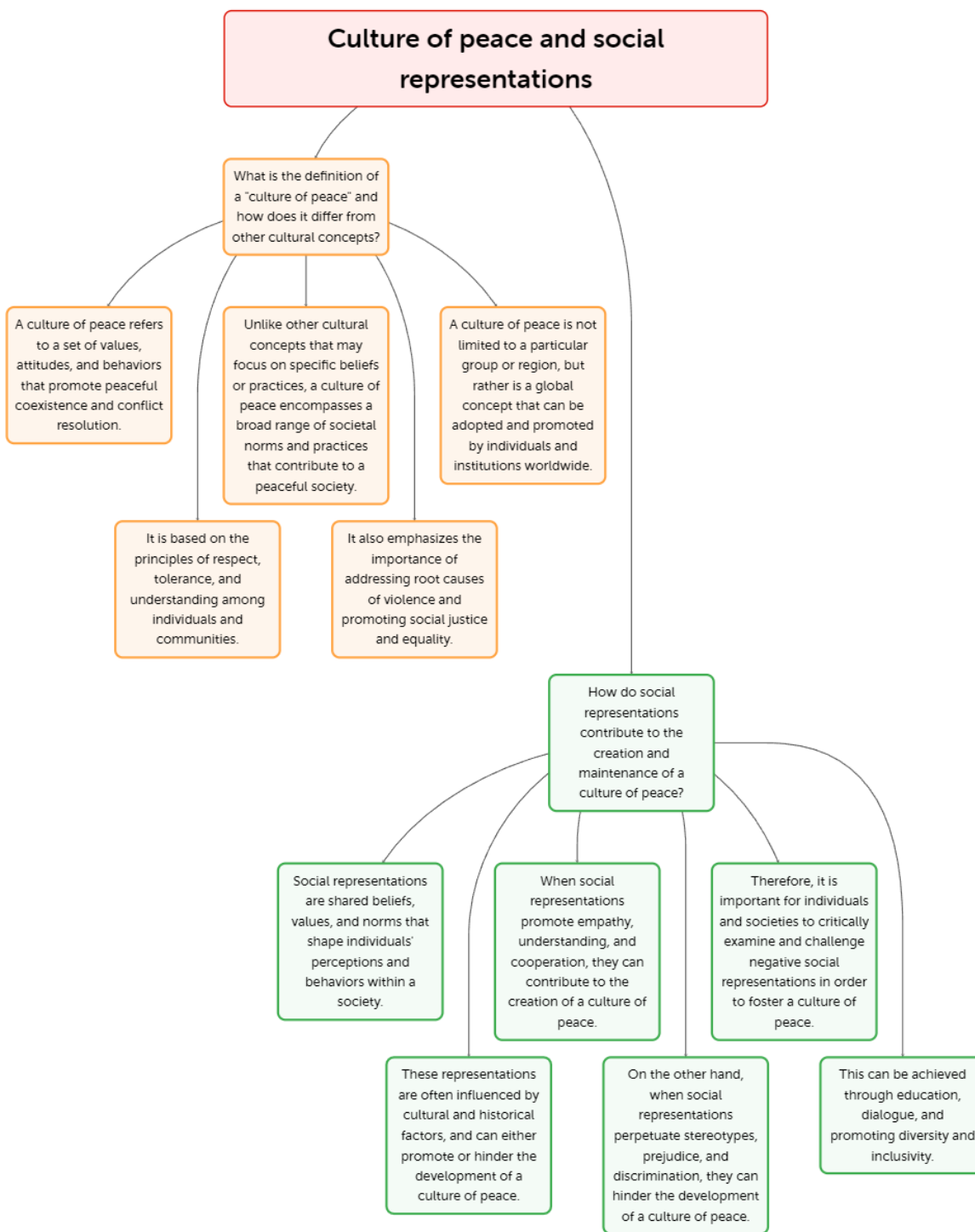
The culture of peace and social representations

The culture of peace is defined as a set of values, attitudes, behaviors and practices that promote the prevention and resolution of conflicts peacefully, which fosters mutual understanding, social justice, gender equality, respect for human rights. humans and non-violence. This concept has gained relevance in recent decades due to the numerous conflicts and acts of violence that have affected communities and countries around the world (Mora Rosales *et al* ., 2023; United Nations Organization, 2022).

In this context, as Cerdas Agüero (2015) points out, "peace education is constituted as a strategy, a challenge and an educational process based on the recognition, respect and experience of human rights, as well as respect for the dignity of people" (p.136). Therefore, talking about peace implies respect and recognition of people's dignity, as well as their rights, in a social environment of tolerance.

The study of peace is based on the Declaration on a Culture of Peace issued by the Assembly of the United Nations Organization (1999), which establishes that "peace is not only the absence of conflict, but also the requires a positive, dynamic and participatory process in which dialogue is promoted and conflicts are resolved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation" (p. 2. With this declaration, the organization raised the need to involve states and human groups in participating in this dynamic process, guided by values, among which respect for life and human rights stands out (Restrepo Valencia and Espinosa Ortega, 2023).

In this study, the link between the culture of peace and social representations is established as a link that promotes tolerance, respect, justice and equity among people, which is why peace is taken as a human right (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map on the culture of peace and social representations

Culture of peace and social representations

What is the definition of a "culture of peace" and how does it differ from other cultural concepts?

A culture of peace refers to a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that promote peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution.

Unlike other cultural concepts that may focus on specific beliefs or practices, a culture of peace encompasses a broad range of societal norms and practices that contribute to a peaceful society.

A culture of peace is not limited to a particular group or region, but rather is a global concept that can be adopted and promoted by individuals and institutions worldwide.

It is based on the principles of respect, tolerance, and understanding among individuals and communities.

It also emphasizes the importance of addressing root causes of violence and promoting social justice and equality.

How do social representations contribute to the creation and maintenance of a culture of peace?

Social representations are shared beliefs, values, and norms that shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors within a society.

When social representations promote empathy, understanding, and cooperation, they can contribute to the creation of a culture of peace.

Therefore, it is important for individuals and societies to critically examine and challenge negative social representations in order to foster a culture of peace.

These representations are often influenced by cultural and historical factors, and can either promote or hinder the development of a culture of peace.

On the other hand, when social representations perpetuate stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, they can hinder the development of a culture of peace.

This can be achieved through education, dialogue, and promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Source: self made

Likewise, the value of education is highlighted as a fundamental means to build a culture of peace, as well as that of governments for the strengthening and promotion of this culture, and the full commitment of civil society for its total development (Palacios, 2023; Urbina Cárdenas and Ovalles Rodríguez, 2018).

The social representations

Social representations play a fundamental role in the construction of a culture of peace, since, as mentioned above, this dynamic process involves the construction of a representation of social reality through objectification, which influences the way in which that individuals perceive, interpret and act in relation to conflict and violence. According to Moscovici (1976), social representations are mental constructions shared by a group or society, which allow the organization and understanding of social reality. However, in the field of the culture of peace, social representations can be both obstacles and facilitators for the construction of a peaceful society.

On the one hand, social representations rooted in stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination can perpetuate violence and conflict. For example, the social representation of "others" as enemies or adversaries can fuel polarization and hatred, creating an environment conducive to violent acts. Furthermore, social representations can also be used as tools to change violent attitudes and behaviors, and to promote values and visions that promote peace and non-violence.

For Durkheim (1895), social representations fulfill an integrative and regulatory function in society, which is why they can contribute to the construction of a culture of peace by promoting solidarity, understanding and mutual respect. In this sense, it is essential that social representations of the culture of peace are based on an inclusive and diverse approach, which promotes gender equality, multiculturalism and respect for diversity. García and Pérez (2015) point out that social representations of peace must recognize and value the different perspectives, experiences and needs of diverse social groups, which requires avoiding the imposition of a single dominant vision.

However, Landini (2008) suggests that the concept of social representations is difficult to locate, since he considers that it is an open term that can be explored from various approaches and is constantly under construction. For him, when carrying out research under this theory, the researcher faces the question of clarifying to what extent the information found really constitutes a social representation and at what point it ceases to be so. Therefore, it reflects on the reliability of this theory due to the mixture of psychological and social aspects, where emotions are intertwined with cognitive and attitudinal elements.

He even states that the knowledge attributed to a social representation " is not in the integration of the scientific into everyday life but in the understanding of the experiences with these actors, meaning in relation to other representations" (p. 76). In other words, it questions whether social representations are based on a true objectification, since it considers that this theory refers more to areas or domains of reality than to objectified interpretations of it. From the previous arguments, the aforementioned author concludes that it would be networks of social representations

that allow us to build knowledge of reality, since these cannot occur individually without being linked to each other in the mind of each person, which It makes the construction of collective knowledge difficult because even within a community there are contradictions in the way each member perceives or explains a social phenomenon.

Now, and despite these questions, for the purpose of this work we consider that social representations do make their study and application possible to explore in the imagination of each person what in their sense of reality they identify and understand as a culture of peace. . This allows in a research to know the version or conceptualization of each person, giving room for them to express their interest and particular vision on the topic, which allows the researcher to know and better understand the object of study.

Link between the culture of peace and social representations

The culture of peace is built through the promotion of values and practices that encourage the prevention and resolution of conflicts peacefully. In this sense, social representations play a crucial role in this construction, since they can perpetuate or change violent attitudes and behaviors, so it is important to recognize the possible relationship between social representations and the culture of peace, vital elements to promote values. that allow interactions between people to be inclusive and diverse.

This, of course, implies recognizing and valuing gender equality, multiculturalism and respect for diversity with the aim of building a peaceful society free of violence. The culture of peace, therefore, can be understood as a process of social construction, which arises from education for peace and which results in the promotion of values that contribute to peaceful coexistence, hence exploring the objectifications that each person has regarding peace is essential to advance in the construction of a more just and harmonious society.

Definition of culture of peace by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The culture of peace, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is a broad concept that covers several aspects and dimensions with the aim of promoting peace in all areas of society; Even so, it defines it as a set of values, attitudes, behaviors and structures that reject violence, prevent conflicts and seek peaceful solutions (UNESCO, 2023).

In its Declaration on a Culture of Peace adopted in 1999, UNESCO establishes the principles on which the culture of peace is based, that is, respect for life, rejection of violence, respect for human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, understanding, tolerance and solidarity. Respect for life is essential to promote a culture of peace, since it implies valuing human life in all its forms and manifestations. According to UNESCO, violence should not be accepted as a solution to conflicts, but rather peaceful alternatives should be sought to resolve them. Furthermore, the organization highlights the importance of guaranteeing and protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of their gender, race, religion or ethnic origin.

For his part, Johan Galtung (1990) proposes categorizing the types of violence into three dimensions: cultural, structural and direct. For this author, cultural violence is "any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form" (p. 149. This idea is illustrated with a pyramid where he places cultural and structural violence in the at the bottom and direct violence at the top, in such a way that cultural and structural violence supports direct violence. Therefore, he believes that the culture of peace runs the risk of the difficulty that a pacifist culture entails due to the temptation to institutionalize it, to make it mandatory, with the intention of internalizing it everywhere and to all people, which implies the risk of it becoming a form of cultural violence by imposing a univocal vision of a culture of peace.

Regarding gender equality, it is an essential component of the culture of peace, since it implies eliminating all forms of discrimination and promoting equal participation in all areas of society. Likewise, democratic participation is fundamental, since it allows the construction of more just and equitable societies, where all voices are heard and considered. For this reason, UNESCO highlights the importance of promoting dialogue and mutual respect between different cultures and religions, as well as the need to promote solidarity and cooperation between countries to jointly address global challenges.

The culture of peace, according to UNESCO's definition, implies a set of values and practices that seek to prevent conflicts and promote peace in all areas of society. To achieve this, it is essential to promote respect for life, reject violence, guarantee human rights, promote gender equality, encourage democratic participation and cultivate tolerance, understanding and solidarity, which requires that all people, governments and organizations work together to promote and disseminate a true culture of peace.

Contextual characterization of the culture of peace in young university students

Culture of peace concept has been observed among students, especially university students (Jiménez Bautista, 2020; León Vargas, 2023). This interest reflects the increasing importance given to promoting peaceful and supportive coexistence between individuals and societies, thereby establishing the basis for more effective communicative and social relationships.

In the university context, a tendency has been observed in Latin America to analyze the experiences of implementing peace promotion programs, particularly after armed conflicts. For this research, we start from the premise that young people can express their understanding of the culture of peace and conflict resolution, which allows a better understanding of its meaning for societies such as Mexico. Exploring how the culture of peace is understood from the university level provides a point of comparison with understanding in society at large. This, in turn, facilitates the implementation of concrete actions that contribute to the construction of a harmonious society, where human rights are respected, gender equality is promoted, social justice is fostered and cultural diversity is valued.

In this context, education plays a fundamental role in promoting a culture of peace among university students, since it is in the classrooms where fundamental values such as respect, empathy, tolerance and solidarity must be instilled (Gómez Collado and García Hernández, 2018). For this, it is essential that they develop programs and activities that encourage dialogue, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect for diversity, as well as facilitate spaces for reflection and debate that allow young people to express their concerns and proposals on this topic (Palacios , 2023), while teachers, for their part, have the responsibility of transmitting these principles through pedagogical strategies that promote the active participation of students.

Now, among the relevant research in this area, the work carried out by Urbina Cárdenas and Barrera Acevedo (2017) stands out, who addressed the issue from the perspective of the concepts of recognition and social representations in the subjects participating in their study. These authors identified the construction of a citizen *ethos* that recognizes young people as bearers of meanings that must be identified, understood and discussed to find answers and solutions to the major problems that affect the daily life of communities. In addition, they defined study categories regarding recognition, such as recognition and culture for peace, recognition of victims, recognition of perpetrators, and self-recognition.

From these categories, Urbina Cárdenas and Barrera Acevedo (2017) highlight significant findings in their research. For example, in relation to recognition as an axis for building peace, they

point out that "it not only concerns the need to create new pedagogies, as a driving principle for achieving this country's objective, but also the discovery of new concepts and new clues for the construction of creative forms that make peace possible" (p.102). Furthermore, the young people participating in their study highlight, among the study categories, the importance of acceptance of others, respect, good treatment, and participation and transformation as fundamental elements for building peace. They consider that these elements are necessary to achieve the inclusion of everyone in society, based on their recognition and acceptance.

Furthermore, for the young people participating in the study, from their representations, acceptance of others, respect, good treatment and participation and transformation are important as categories for the construction of peace, since they believe that these elements are necessary to achieve the inclusion of everyone in society, based on their recognition and acceptance.

In the field of social sciences, particularly in the field of education, the culture of peace has been a widely studied topic. García Vergara and Carrillo Lizarazo (2017) carried out research focused on the conflict and the perspective of the participants, specifically in relation to young people's ways of thinking about war and peace as intimate representations linked to their experiences. Additionally, they examined how peace can be better understood if teaching-learning practices are involved. In their study, García Vergara and Carrillo Lizarazo (2017) used a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with young people from various social contexts through which the researchers were able to explore the perceptions and experiences of young people around war, peace and the culture of peace.

The results of the research revealed that young people had a limited understanding of these terms, and that their intimate representations were influenced by their personal experiences and social contexts. Some young people, in fact, associated war with violence and destruction, while others considered it a legitimate way to defend interests or resolve conflicts. Regarding peace, the participants conceived it mainly as the absence of war, but they also related it to peaceful coexistence, social justice and equality.

García Vergara and Carrillo Lizarazo (2017) highlighted the importance of teaching-learning practices in the understanding and promotion of the culture of peace among young people, and pointed out that, through educational activities that encourage critical reflection, dialogue and empathy, values and attitudes can be promoted that contribute to the construction of a culture of peace. Therefore, these authors emphasize the need to address the culture of peace from an educational perspective, taking into consideration the intimate representations of young people about war and peace. The research findings highlight the importance of teaching-learning practices

to promote a broader and deeper understanding of peace, as well as to foster values and attitudes that contribute to the construction of a culture of peace.

In another aspect of the study, the authors also emphasize the obstacles to peace identified by the young participants. They expressed that beatings, insecurity, street abuse, verbal and psychological aggression are factors that affect the construction of peace. Therefore, the authors conclude that it is necessary to establish relationships with others in conditions free of violence and promote an inclusive, deliberative and informed dialogue.

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting the study developed by Parra Cabrera and Jiménez Bautista (2016), who analyze the role of conflict in the university environment from a psychological perspective. The authors argue that the concept of peace is not limited solely to the absence of conflicts, but implies the search for alternatives for pacification in a critical, reflective and hopeful society. In their research, Parra Cabrera and Jiménez Bautista (2016) maintain that conflict is an inherent part of university life and that its proper management can contribute to the personal and academic development of students. From their perspectives, conflict at university can arise due to differences in opinions, interests and values, hence it is significant to address it constructively to avoid negative consequences. In addition, they emphasize the importance of fostering a university environment that promotes tolerance, dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts , which will contribute to the formation of critical and reflective individuals, capable of seeking peaceful solutions in conflict situations.

From a psychological perspective, Parra and Jiménez (2016) point out that conflict in the university environment can generate stress, anxiety and other emotional problems in students, so it is essential that educational institutions provide psychological support and conflict management tools. to their students. Finally, the research of Parra and Jiménez (2016) suggests providing psychological support to students to manage conflict situations in a healthy way.

Methodology

Type of study

The present study was based on a qualitative-quantitative approach, for which social representations were used as a theoretical and methodological framework. This allowed for a deeper and more detailed understanding of the phenomena studied, while quantitative data was collected to support and complement the qualitative findings. This mixed approach is widely used in studies on social representations and culture of peace in university students.

One of the works taken as a reference in this aspect was that of Creswell (2014), who points out that "the mixed approach allows us to address the complexity of the social representations of the culture of peace in university students, by combining the measurement of quantitative variables with the deep analysis of narratives and underlying meanings" (p. 45), while Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) highlight that "the mixed approach is especially useful to explore the social representations of the culture of peace in university students, since it allows us to obtain numerical data that can be complemented and enriched with testimonies and personal stories" (p. 78).

On the other hand, the study is also classified as non-experimental, since no variables were manipulated nor control groups established. Instead, data were collected through the free listing technique, which allowed participants to express their ideas and opinions spontaneously and without restrictions. This technique has been widely used in qualitative studies to collect data in an unstructured way and allow participants to freely express their ideas and opinions (Hernández Sampieri *et al*., 2016).

Furthermore, the study was carried out cross-sectionally, meaning that data were collected at a single point in time, without long-term follow-up (Hernández Sampieri *et al*., 2016). This methodology allowed us to obtain a snapshot of the social representations at the time of the study.

Participants

The present study was carried out with a non-probabilistic sample of 112 university students with the objective of obtaining a broad and enriching vision of the research topic. The choice of a non-probabilistic sample was based on the availability and accessibility of the participants.

Specifically, the sample was made up mostly of women (65% of the participants), while the remaining 35% were made up of men. This gender distribution reflects the reality of the student population at the university where the study was carried out.

Regarding the age of the participants, the majority of them are in the range of 18 to 25 years old. Specifically, the age group that ranges from 21 to 25 years old represented the highest percentage (55%), and corresponds to undergraduate students, who are in the final stage of their academic training.

The findings collected in this research could be useful to better understand the characteristics and needs of university students in this age range to make informed decisions about the culture of peace and strengthen the code of ethics at the University of Guadalajara.

In support of these results, several previous studies have documented the growing presence of women in higher education and the gender gap in university enrollment. According to Smith

(2018), women have surpassed men in university enrollment in many countries, leading to a change in gender dynamics within educational institutions. Furthermore, studies such as that of Johnson *et al* . (2017) have found that college students in the 21-25 age range tend to be more career-focused and have higher levels of academic engagement compared to younger students.

The selection of this sample of university students was carried out taking into account the relevance and pertinence of their experiences and knowledge in relation to the research topic. The participation of university students allowed us to obtain a detailed and specific vision of the problems and perspectives related to the topic under study.

Student participation in the research was essential to obtain significant and relevant data. During the data collection process, individual interviews and discussion groups were carried out in which participants shared their experiences, opinions and reflections on the topic under study. It should be noted that everyone was informed about the objectives and nature of the study, as well as the ethical and confidential aspects of their participation. Furthermore, data confidentiality was guaranteed and informed consent was obtained from each participant before inclusion in the study.

Figure 2. Crossover, what is your gender? / indicate which age group you belong to
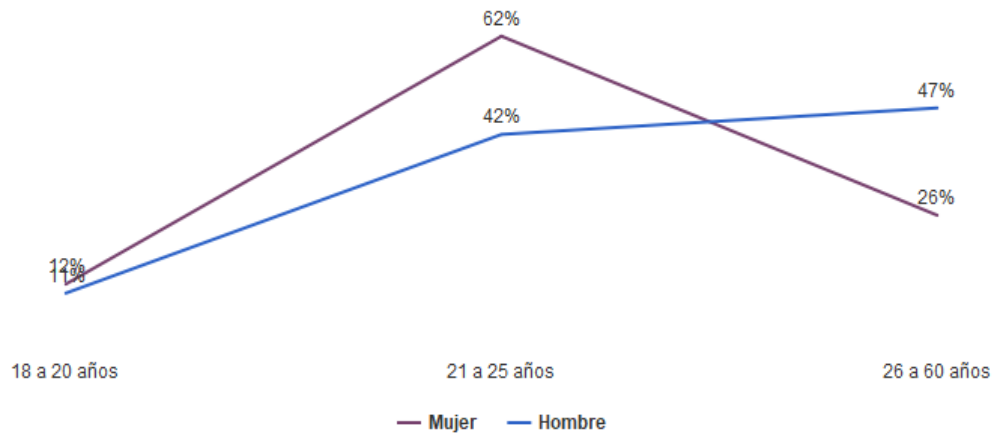
Source: self made

Instrument

For data collection, the application of the free listing technique was chosen due to its demonstrated effectiveness in collecting information on cultural domains related to health. An example of this was a study carried out in 2014 that explored non-institutional knowledge about malaria in Colombia (Fernández-Niño *et al* ., 2014).

This technique has also been used in other works to investigate the social representations of the concept of *employment* in various cultural contexts and population groups (Torres-López *et al* ., 2021). The versatility of this technique is reflected in its application to understand the content and structure of social representations, as observed in a study carried out in 2018 on the representations of employment and unemployment in Santa Cruz, Tenerife (Torres-López *et al* ., 2018).

Furthermore, the free listing technique has been implemented in research contexts in neuroscience and *neuromarketing* , as evidenced in an investigation carried out in 2019 on the analysis of the packaging design of educational toys (Varón *et al* ., 2019). On the other hand, this technique has also been applied in the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as mentioned in a research work on peace carried out by Vera in 2013 (Vera, 2013).

Furthermore, in the educational field, the free listing technique has been used in methodological research, as evidenced in a study published in 2017 that used factor analysis as a statistical technique (Sánchez, 2017).

As can be seen, this technique has been used in a variety of research contexts, from public health and social sciences to neuroscience, neuromarketing *and* conflict resolution. Its versatility and effectiveness make it a valuable tool for exploring and understanding social representations, cultural knowledge and various phenomena in different fields of study.

On the other hand, regarding the instrument, it was structured taking into account sociodemographic data, such as age, gender, marital status, the university center of affiliation and the university degree that the participants were studying. Likewise, they were asked to write on the Survey platform Monkey (2023) where this instrument was loaded, the five main terms that came to mind when they heard the concept "culture of peace", and then described them. A table is attached to display this data (table 1).

Table 1. Operationalization of the variables related to sociodemographic data and free culture of peace lists.

Dimension	Variable	nominal definition	Measurement unit	Variable type	Measurement level	Operational definition
	Age	Age range of the respondent	Age range 18-24 25-35 36 and over	Quantitative	Discrete interval	Mention your age range
	Gender	Gender differentiator: man, woman	Female or male	Qualitative	Nominal, dichotomous	What gender does it belong to?
Sociodemographic data	Civil status	Interpersonal relationships: single, married, widowed, divorced, in a common law union, other	Single, married, widowed, divorced, in common law, other	Qualitative	Nominal, dichotomous	What is your marital status?
	Education	University Center	Social Sciences and	Qualitative	Nominal, dichotomous	Which University

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			Humanities, Ciénega			Center does it belong to?
	Education	Educational program	International relations. Right	Qualitative	Nominal, dichotomous	Educational program to which it belongs

Free listings	
Indicate the five main words that come to mind when you hear the concept *culture of peace*	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
Now point out why you have indicated each of the words you have described:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Source: self made

Instrument validation

Validation of the free listing instrument was carried out through an iterative process that involved careful planning and analysis. After designing the instrument, a pilot test was carried out with 10% of the students to evaluate its effectiveness. Based on the results of this test, adjustments were made to the sociodemographic questions, including the integration of age groups for a better understanding of the data.

In addition, the instrument was presented to a group of experts who work in the field of culture of peace with young university students through the Unesco Chair. These experts evaluated the instrument and expressed their approval to apply it in the university context.

Procedure

The research protocol was designed and approval of the project was obtained with financing through the call for research projects 2023 of the University Center for Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Guadalajara. The field work was carried out between June and September 2023.

Aim

The objective of this article is to explore the meaning of the culture of peace in university students.

Analysis of data

The data were processed using Excel, iQ3 DATAVID and MAXQDA, which allowed obtaining basic statistics of the sociodemographic variables of the participants in the study, as well as creating networks and correspondence maps on the codes that give meaning to the culture of peace.

Results

From the analysis carried out through the free lists, it is observed that 70% of the participants in the study attribute a significant value to respect, since they consider it as a vital element to build a harmonious and peaceful coexistence. The results show a value of $p < 0.01$, a Chi2 statistic $= 17,579.8$ and degrees of freedom $= 15,052$, which indicates a highly significant relationship between the responses associated with the *culture of peace concept* . This suggests that the associations made with this term are not random, but are closely linked to the concepts and practices that represent the culture of peace. The associations reflect a deep and meaningful understanding of the culture of peace, highlighting the importance of this concept in the perception of respondents.

These relationships cover a variety of topics, such as the promotion of peace through education, ethics, cooperation, friendship, freedom, human rights, solidarity, respect for biodiversity, conciliation and equity. of genre. Study participants demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of a culture of peace that transcends the absence of violence and includes the promotion of values, peaceful conflict resolution, social justice, peace education, and the creation of school and community environments. that promote peaceful coexistence and mutual respect (figure 2).

Figure 3. Crossover , *what are the first five words or phrases that come to mind when you hear the phrase "culture of peace"* and *why did you make that association?*

Note: The relationship is very significant. p value = < 0.01; Chi2 = 17,579.8; degrees of freedom = 15,052.

Source: self made

Likewise, university students recognize the importance of human rights as fundamental for a culture of peace and understand that all people have the right to live with dignity, freedom, equality and justice. This means that by valuing human rights they are committed to combating any form of discrimination, violence or injustice. In other words, they promote social inclusion, respect diversity and defend the rights of minorities, which contributes to the construction of a more just and peaceful society for all.

In addition, an analysis was carried out by age groups of the participants and their assessment regarding the promotion of a culture of peace. In this regard, it is worth noting that the age group between 18 and 20 years old significantly values the promotion of a culture of peace, cordiality, being a good citizen and having stability in their lives.

Furthermore, the correspondence analysis reveals significant associations between age groups and words or phrases related to the "culture of peace." 58% of the information is projected on the map, divided into 34% horizontally (F1) and 24% vertically (F2). The proximity or distance

between elements visualizes over- or under-represented associations. The relationship is highly significant, with a value of p < 0.01, a Chi2 statistic = 328.6 and degrees of freedom = 180. These results suggest that the associations are influenced by the experiences, values and perceptions of each stage of life, which which reflects the diversity of topics related to the culture of peace that are significant for different age groups. Specifically, it was significantly found that the age group between 18 and 20 years old values coexistence, stability and security.

Figure 4. Correspondence map of age groups on word or phrase associations
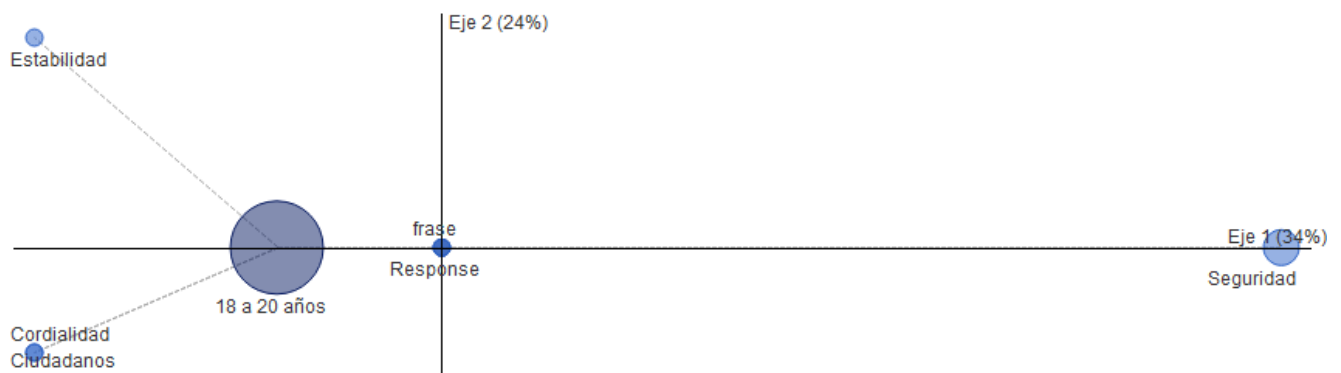
Statistical note: The most significant modalities are shown. The correspondence map projects 58% of the information, divided into 34% horizontally (F1) and 24% vertically (F2). The proximity or distance between elements visualizes over- or under-represented associations. The relationship is very significant. P value = < 0.01; Chi2 = 328.6; Degrees of freedom = 180.
Source: self made

When analyzing gender in relation to the promotion of a culture of peace, a disparity is observed in the perception between men and women, since 62% of them indicated that peace is essential to create an environment of respect and tolerance among members. of the university community. This perspective aligns with the principles of peacebuilding, and emphasizes the importance of fostering a harmonious and inclusive environment within the academic environment.

On the other hand, 38% of men expressed that the culture of peace would depend on the situational context, so it would not be applicable in all university environments. This response reflects a more varied point of view and suggests a possible divergence in men's understanding of the role and impact of peace within the university community. The gender disparity in the perception of the importance of peace in the university environment highlights the need for more research and initiatives aimed at promoting a shared understanding and commitment to cultivating

a culture of peace that transcends gender differences. Additionally, it highlights the importance of addressing diverse perspectives and experiences in developing strategies and programs to foster peace and harmony within the university community.

Additional research and analysis could delve into the underlying factors that contribute to these gender differences in perceptions of peace within the university context, which would provide valuable information for the development of specific interventions and initiatives aimed at promoting a culture of peace that resonates in all members of the university community (figure 4).

Figure 5. Correspondence map

Crossing *, do you consider peace as an essential value in university coexistence?* and *what is your gender?*
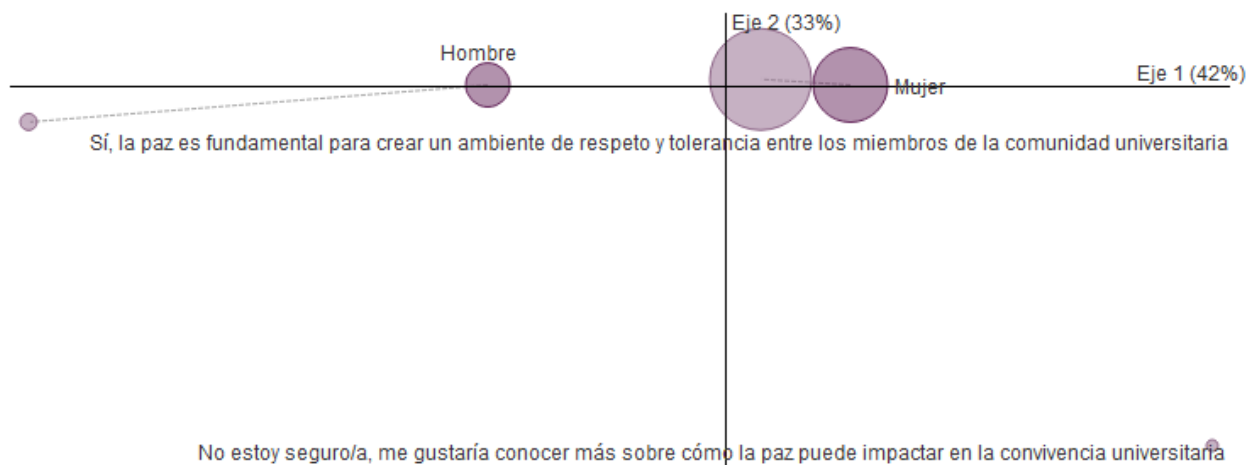
Statistical note: The correspondence map projects 75% of the information, divided into 42% horizontally (F1) and 33% vertically (F2). The proximity or distance between elements visualizes over- or under-represented associations.

The relationship is significant. P value = 0.0; Chi2 = 7.2; Degrees of freedom = 2.

Source: self made

In this sense, the importance of generating a culture of peace according to gender is fundamental to achieving a more just and equitable world. Historically, women have been victims of multiple forms of violence and discrimination based solely on their gender, so building a culture of peace that breaks these patterns of oppression and promotes gender equality is an essential objective.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that gender violence is a violation of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) points out, violence against women constitutes an extreme manifestation of discrimination and a violation of human rights. and fundamental freedoms.

Therefore, generating a culture of peace implies eradicating gender violence in all its forms: from sexual and domestic violence to street harassment and workplace discrimination. In the words of the activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee , "we will never achieve lasting peace if we do not address the issue of gender violence."

Likewise, it is important to recognize that women are key agents in the promotion and construction of peace, since, as mentioned in Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council, they must participate fully at all levels of decision-making and in peace processes. That is, the exclusion of women from these spaces weakens efforts to achieve sustainable and lasting peace.

Finally, generating a culture of peace by gender also implies educating from childhood in values of respect and equality, since education is a fundamental tool to eradicate gender stereotypes and promote non-violent attitudes and behaviors. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum highlights, education is essential to cultivating a citizenry committed to peace and justice.

Discussion

The culture of peace is a process that implies for the study participants the conjunction of key concepts for social coexistence in harmony, such as respect and education, since the first requires the recognition and acceptance of the other, while education, In addition to being considered a human right, it is the way that allows people to find peaceful means of resolving their differences and facilitates sincere bonds of mutual support, understanding and empathy.

The gender issue also stands out due to the number of women who participated in the study. In fact, the vision of how they understand the culture of peace reveals that the violence they have suffered allows them to point out the importance of understanding, respect, cooperation and empathy as indispensable elements to build environments for peaceful conflict resolution and to interpersonal relationships with coexistence in harmony.

Likewise, it is highlighted that students with an age range of 21 to 25 years, from their university perspective, understand that respect is a fundamental value for a harmonious coexistence. Consequently, they value the importance of having quality standards in education and

recognize that human rights are fundamental to building a culture of peace based on cooperation and teamwork. As they access education, people become aware of the value of friendship and respect. Therefore, it is crucial not to neglect the learning environments and values that are fostered at this stage of their lives, particularly respect, cooperation, friendship and freedom.

Furthermore, as the United Nations has stated, the participation of women is fundamental in this process, since they are the ones who have emphasized the importance of respect and cooperation to build a culture of peace in conditions of equality, solidarity and mutual support. It can be inferred, therefore, that education is vital because it transforms people, since the values that can be internalized during this process allow them to develop solidarity towards others.

In short, the findings of our study coincide with what was reported by Gómez Collado and García Hernández (2018) in that education plays a fundamental role in the development of a culture of peace among university students. Therefore, values such as respect, empathy, tolerance and solidarity must be promoted in classrooms to contribute to the construction of a more peaceful and harmonious society.

Conclusions

This article presented the social representations of university students about the culture of peace and highlighted the primary value of respect for coexistence. In addition, education is highlighted as a fundamental human right to access it and as a way to build a harmonious coexistence, as well as the importance of friendship as a sincere and supportive bond that promotes empathy, understanding and mutual support. necessary aspects for every interpersonal and social relationship.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize that the culture of peace and its social representation depend on cultural contexts. This means that the way it is understood may vary between societies that have suffered armed conflicts and political violence, where the culture of peace may involve reconciliation and conflict resolution, and societies where human rights are relevant for the freedoms they offer. In the latter, respect, cooperation and friendship are essential to promote relationships of coexistence in harmony, which contributes to the context for the resolution of conflicts peacefully.

The generation of a culture of peace by gender implies educating from childhood in values of respect and equality, since education is presented as an invaluable tool to eradicate gender stereotypes and promote non-violent attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the construction of a

culture of peace that breaks with these patterns of oppression and promotes gender equality becomes an essential objective, which highlights the importance of the high percentage of participation of women in this study.

In summary, tolerance, respect and diversity constitute fundamental pillars of the culture of peace, hence it is necessary to understand how these young people perceive, value and interpret this social phenomenon, since this provides crucial information to design effective and meaningful strategies. of intervention and promotion of the culture of peace for this group of people. Only through a deep understanding of social representations can we move towards a more just, supportive and peaceful society.

Future lines of research

The study of social representations for the culture of peace in university students must continue, especially to analyze the experience by career profiles. Therefore, it is of interest to identify, depending on the students' profession, which particular values strengthen this culture of peace and what contribution they can make in their future professional practice so that these values are applied in their practice upon graduation. This allows us to evaluate the curricular content regarding its profile that the university provides in this formative stage, taking into account what was stated by the participants in this study, who come from the International Relations and Law degrees at the University of Guadalajara.

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Contributing role	Responsible
Conceptualization	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Methodology	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Software	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Validation	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Formal Analysis	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Investigation	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Resources	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Data curation	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Writing - Preparation of the original draft	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Writing - Review and editing	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Display	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres
Supervision	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Project management	Rocio Calderon Garcia
Fund acquisition	Jorge Alfredo Jimenez Torres