



The sources of information contributing to the cancer's representations on a public of pupils

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Abstract

Throughout a large study on cancer's representations among pupils from Year 6 to the second year of master [1], we got an interest at the different sources of information on this young public. To do so, we asked the pupils where they first heard of cancer. This question is even more important to ask as this disease is the most cited among young people and is associated to dark representations (death and sufferings) [1, 4], while it is not really studied at school until Year 12 (with a specialization in sciences) [5]. It is thus legitimate to question the different sources that structure the representations of a young public.

Our results showed that the family and media spheres are the two main sources of information on cancer. The family sphere is slightly dominant among young pupils but its impact decreases whilst they grow up. In the meantime, media becomes the main source of information, particularly thanks to television. Peers, the scholar sphere and the medical sphere are three other sources though relatively not much influential: the school even seem to be almost absent from the different sources of information among the youngest pupils.

The social practices, values and opinions mainly come from family, media and, to a lesser degree, peers, seem to be the main sources of information structuring the cancer's representations on the young public studied. The knowledge issued from the scholar and medical spheres are, on the other end, less dominant. Even though medicine has made many progress regarding the recovery from many cancers, the notion of death associated to this disease is still dominant among the studied public's representations.

Thus, the scholar sphere seems to be almost absent from the sources of information structuring these representations, while the representations are the result of three sources including values/opinions, social practices and knowledge [6]. It is thus interesting to understand how these familial and media sources of information structure these representations and how the scholar sphere can get involved.

Keywords: *media, family, disease, school, KVP model, SIC*

1. Introduction

Representation is an act of thought related to an object. Through communication, a person is likely to partially convey its own representation of an object [2, 3].

Numerous studies got interested in cancer's representations on the general public, who had globally been confronted to cancer, in a more or less direct way [7, 8]. These studies give us an outlook at a given moment of the way cancer is perceived in our society.

The originality of our approach is based on the choice made to study different scholar publics and to be more precise, our main objective is to identify the different sources of information acting as the starting point of the structuration and/or evolution of the pupils' representations on cancer.

In previous studies, we analysed the representations of young pupils about cancer [1]. We found that cancer is the most present illness and that it is very strongly associated with death, even in the mind of year 6 pupils.

Here we selected 2 different levels, year 6 at primary school (10/11 years old pupils) and year 9 (13/14 years old pupils) and we explored the different sources of information that can supply the representations on cancer of such a public. With this approach, we also wished to question ourselves on the role of the scholar sphere on the development of cancer's representations.

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2. Methodology

The different sources of information contributing to the cancer's representations were identified through the answers given to the question "How did you hear about cancer?". The previous question, rather open, allows the pupils to use their own vocabulary and does not orientate their answers.

2-1. Data collection

The sample questioned is composed of 156 pupils, from two different levels: 38 pupils in Year 6 and 96 pupils in Year 9.

2-2. Analysis of the results

A first set of results is presented thanks to conceptual cards. For each level studied, a conceptual card gives us the different sources of information recounted (gathered in spheres) and their percentages calculated from the number of times the pupils or students cited them.

A second set of results, presented as a diagram, will allow us to follow the eventual evolutions through time of those same sources of information.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Comparison of the importance of the main sources of information, about cancer, between Year 6 and Year 9.

The comparison between these two levels doesn't show strong differences concerning the main sources of information. In both cases, familial and media spheres are the most important sources of information.

The media sphere remains the most largely cited source of information. As the most cited medium is TV (see below), we can think that young children are mainly passively exposed to information about cancer from the media.

The familial sphere seems to be a sphere where cancer is largely evoked with young pupils. It appears to be an important source of information for the representations on cancer.

One of the most noticeable differences between both levels is regarding the medical sphere. A significant part of year 6 pupils declared to have been influenced by information from hospital or practitioners (15%), whereas very few year 9 pupils declared that (1%).

Finally, scholar sphere is almost absent at both levels.

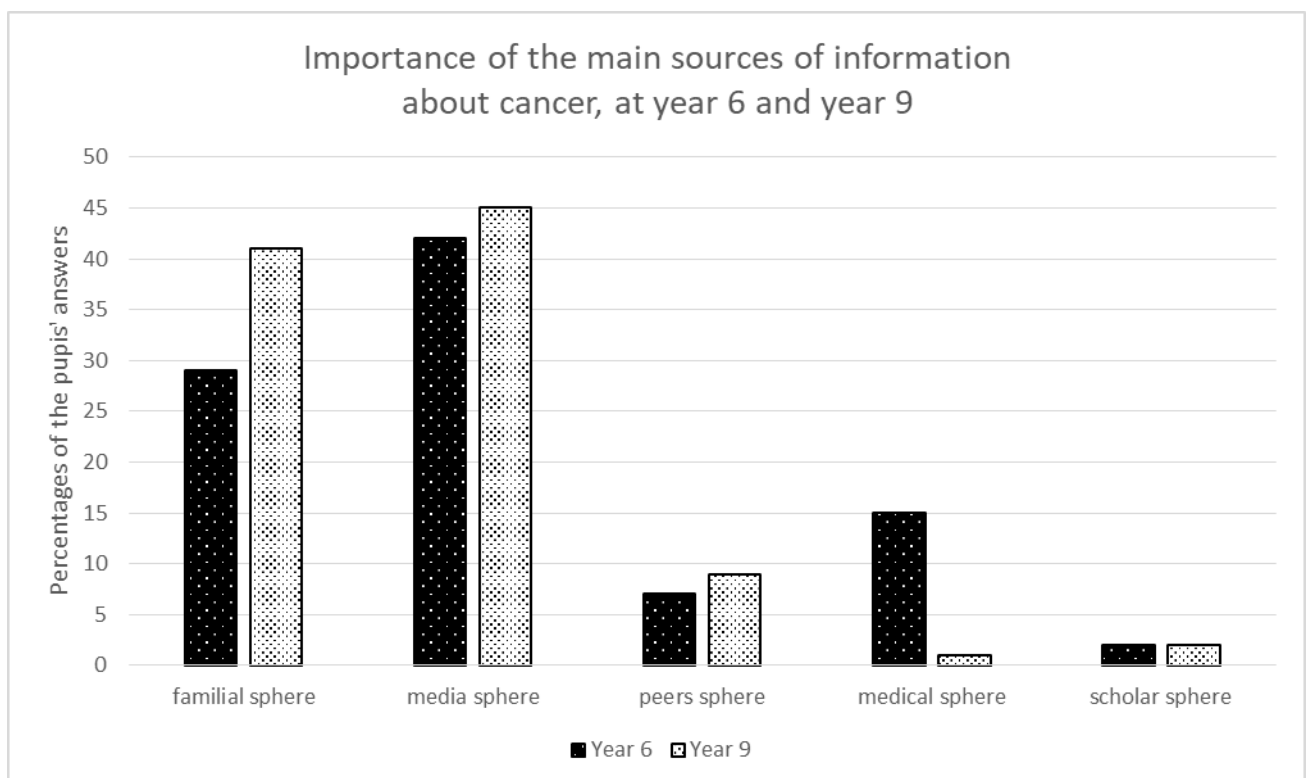




Fig. 1: Comparison of the importance of the main sources of information, about cancer, between Year 6 and Year 9.

3.2 The sources of information of year 6 pupils about cancer

In Year 6, a large majority of the answers given is linked to the familial sphere (29%) or the media sphere (42%). The answers regarding the family are situated on two levels: most pupils said they heard about cancer during family discussions (19%) while some others related that one of their family members had cancer (4%).

Regarding the media sphere, we noticed that obviously TV was prominent (35%) but other media were cited as well, such as the internet (2%). One may thus wonder the types of programmes pupils of that age have access to, on television. Indeed, programmes adapted to children are not that many so are they rather fiction or documentary programmes specialised on health?

Packets of cigarettes appear in 2% of the answers as a source of information on cancer. We may wonder how a pupil in Year 6 has access to an information conveyed on a packet of cigarettes. Was it thanks to a poster with a packet of cigarettes, an add or a direct contact with a packet of cigarettes?

The peers sphere is also represented in the answers given by Year 6 pupils (8%). It thus seems to be a serious matter for kids aged 10/11 years old as they talk about it together in the school playground. We can notice that the scholar sphere is poorly represented, as only 2% of year 6 pupils mentioned they heard about cancer in class.

Finally, let's notice that, for 2% of the Year 6 pupils questioned, they had never heard about cancer.

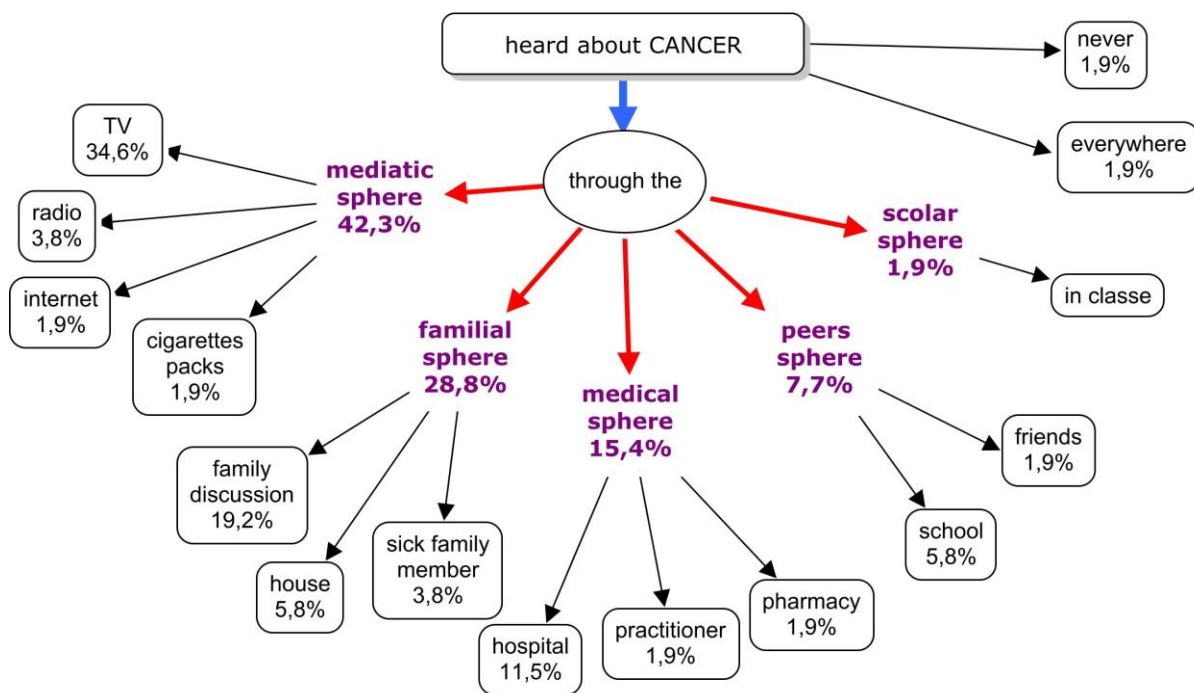


Fig. 2: The sources of information and the percentages collected from the answers given by pupils in Year 6 (n=38)



3.3 The sources of information of Year 9 pupils about cancer

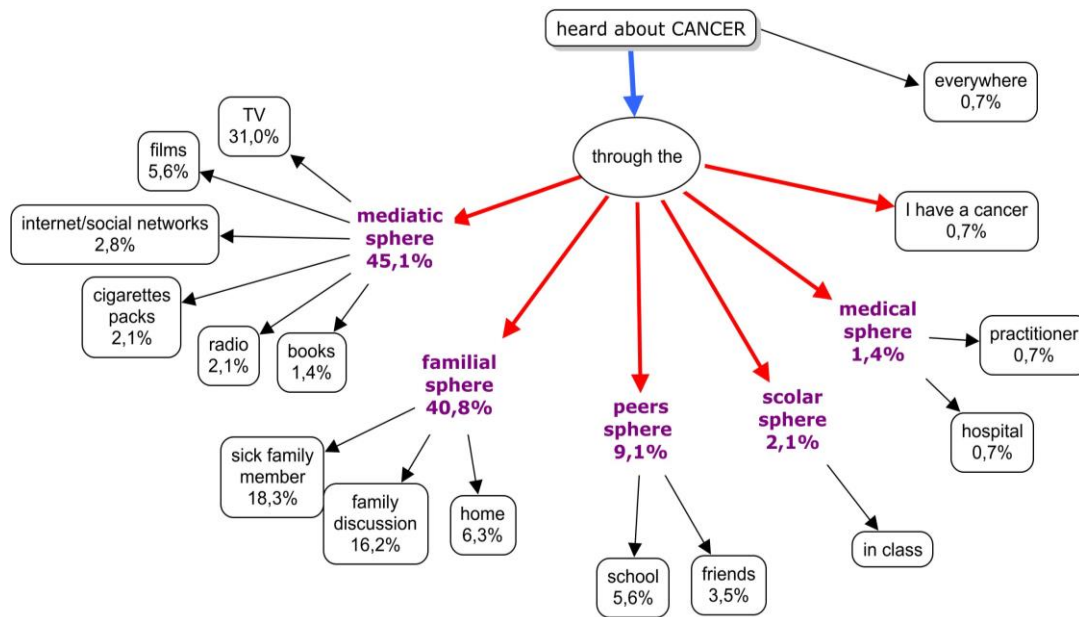


Fig. 3: The sources of information and the percentages collected from the answers given by pupils in Year 9 (n=96)

In Year 9, the familial and media spheres are once again prominent.

Regarding the familial sphere, the proportion of pupils that declared knowing a member of their family with cancer has considerably increased from 4% to 18%.

It is here important to precise that it means that more than 1 out of 6 kids of that age knows or has known someone from his family with cancer.

The media sphere did not immensely change compared with the Year 6 conceptual card. TV remains the main media source of information. However, one can see that films may have a greater impact on this young public as for 6% of them a film is a source of information on cancer.

The peers sphere still appears as a way of exchanging with friends at the school playground.

At this level, the scholar sphere remains very secondary (2%).

4. Conclusion

Our results showed that from Year 6, cancer is a very present topic in a pupil's life [1] and that it is rather rare that they have not heard of it. The topic is often tackled in the familial sphere, largely heard in the media, mainly at the TV and sometimes discussed between peers. We can thus suggest that from a very young age, at least as early as 10-11 years old, the representations on cancer in our kids' minds start developing (or are already developed) with information coming mostly from family, media and to a less extent, discussions or opinions issued by peers.

The references to medical spheres appeared later: from 12-13 years old, whereas scholar sphere seems to be inefficient at these levels. In fact, cancer is usually treated only at year 12 with specialisation in sciences (15-16 years old) [5].

Former studies showed that cancer was strongly perceived by the scholar public with an extreme dangerousness factor. Pupils and students cited cancer as the most serious disease and the deadliest, way before AIDS [1]. In that, the scholar public share a same sensibility with the rest of the population [4, 7, 8].

Even though medicine has made a lot of progress in the recovery from numerous cancers, the notion of death is still associated to this disease in the representations of the studied public [1, 4].

The scholar sphere is practically absent from the sources of information that structure these representations, yet the representations remain the product of a triptych involving values/opinions, social experience but also knowledge [6]. It would thus be interesting to understand how these media and familial sources of information structure these representations and how the scholar sphere could be more implicated.



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