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Social Representations of Bogota - Colombia Inhabitants Regarding a Conditional Cash Transfer Policy

Juan S. Hernández
Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, juans.hernandezm@utadeo.edu.co

Wilson G. Jiménez-Barbosa
Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, wilsong.jimenezb@utadeo.edu.co

Johanna S. Acuña
Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, jsareth77@yahoo.com

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Abstract

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Keywords

"Más Familias en Acción, " social representations, public policy, hermeneutics

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Juan Sebastián Hernández Monsalve, Wilson Giovanni Jiménez-Barbosa, and
Johanna Sareth Acuña Gómez
Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Colombia

The current article shows the development of a research process whose main objective was to explain the influence of the social representations of the inhabitants of Bogotá, Colombia in the implementation of the public policy of conditional cash transfers "Más Familias en Acción." For this aim, a qualitative study of hermeneutic design was conducted with beneficiaries of the program and non-beneficiaries, in which, through the application of semi-structured interviews, the most frequent social representations about subsidies, policies, work, education, health, among other relevant issues related to this public policy were identified and once the information was coded by using the Atlas.ti software, interpretation of results was done making possible to establish a relationship between the social representations found and the implementation of "Más Familias en Acción," leading to the understanding of how social representations as sets of ideas, values and practices that become a social code that denominates the individual and collective reality, have influence both in the way in which the beneficiaries of the program conceive their social reality, and in the sense they give to the program, as well as in their articulation and interaction with it, enabling its implementation, which may or may not occur according to the objectives of public policy.

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Introduction

"Más Familias en Ación" (More Families in Action, hereinafter referred to as MFA) is a public policy that through conditional cash transfers aims for, in the short term to reduce the economic restrictions of its beneficiaries concerning the lack of access to health and education, and in the long term their social mobility (Benson, 2012).

This paper displays the process and results of a hermeneutic qualitative research in which social representations, that is the set of practices, ideas and values, were identified, those most commonly found in members of Bogota society, including beneficiaries of MFA and non-beneficiaries with the objective of identifying the possible influence of these representations in the implementation stage of this public policy. It should be clarified that the intention of exploring and analyzing such social representations is to give a voice to those who, during the exercise of neoliberalism and technocracy, practices associated with conditional cash transfers, did not participate in the public policy-making process. In addition, to know the perspective of that part of society which is the object of political activity but not participant of the decision-making process, in the solution of problems affecting society as a unity and not as a disaggregated conglomerate of heterogeneous groups distant between them, each one with peculiar and opposite interests.

Literature Review

Public Policy

Public policy (hereinafter referred to as PP) has multiple definitions, and as a political issue, it can be approached from different perspectives, tendencies and schools of thought, however, and throughout this document, it will be assumed as the process that integrates actions, inactions, agreements and instruments, developed by public sector authorities and the possible participation of the private sector, in order to solve or avoid problematic situations (Gavilanes, 2010).

For the PP to take place, it must previously mark a cycle in which four stages can be distinguished: the problem identification when a problematic situation of interest to a sector of society or to society in general becomes recognizable to a point such that the State decides to take action to solve it; the formulation in which State institutions consider the alternatives to solve the problem and agree with those who are affected and / or interested in it; the implementation when the policy is materialized, in other words, it is set in motion to address the problem; the evaluation in which obtained results after the execution stage are analyzed and then the real impact of what was done is measured (Vargas, 1999).

Subsidies

A subsidy can be defined as a financial contribution of a government or government agent, which bestows a benefit to its recipients. (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017).

They can be classified as: *Subsidies and other direct payments* when they are delivered temporarily and have a specific destination such as the coverage of expenses of a person or company, for example, a food subsidy or a subsidy to cover the monthly pay of house rental for a worker who moves to a new place for work purposes; *Tax concessions* when a reduction of tax payments is conceded to individuals or companies, can occur as a tax exclusion if they are completely exempt from paying, tax credit if it is possible to defer a tax on quotas and tax deferral if there is possibility of postponing payment over time; *In-kind subsidies*, when a subsidy is handled in a different way from money, for example subsidized housing, scholarships; *Cross subsidies* when a company uses the income obtained in some market segment to reduce the final cost for consumer in another market segment, for example, airports subsidize costs associated with providing their passengers with services by using money from sales of duty free stores; *Credit subsidies and government guarantees*, when the government lends money to companies at a lower rate than that offered by banks, when governments ask for less guarantees from companies to pay back loans, when the government delays or extends the payment term, and even when the government serves as guarantor or co-signer of a company to obtain a loan (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017).

Although it is difficult to determine the exact moment in which subsidies were invented and started to be applied, reviewing the historical record in literature from all around the globe, there are landmarks that allow to observe their evolution over time.

In the 16th century, in 1601, in England, the Law of Isabel was introduced. The poor people were categorized in groups to give them support. Thus, the elderly and the ill were given alms and acyl, children were prepared in the realization of tasks, trained people were employed and for those who, without having any limiting condition, decided not to work, there was no subsidy, they were punished and sent to prison instead (Caballero, 2004).

For the 17th century, in 1680 the Spanish monarchy, with the implementation of the Laws of the Indies, it was granted the liberation of "alcabalas" payment for 20 years to new

settlers of the Kingdom of Spain, a tax that levied purchases and sales by 10%, applicable on real estate, furniture and livestock, to the entire population and the payment of "almojarifazgo," custom tariff duties for transfer of incoming and outgoing goods of the kingdom (Cuevas, 2001).

During the 18th century, in 1782, the Law of Gilbet was established in England, which issued foreign aid, a subsidy for trained poor in unemployment situation. Three years later, in 1785, with the agreements of Speenhamland, it was decided to subsidize the trained poor who, having employment, had insufficient income for the maintenance of their family, the amount of money granted was set according to the cost of bread and the number of children in the family (Caballero, 2004).

In the 19th century, with the population increase and the economic crisis, poverty in England became a palpable and growing phenomenon, so the old law for the poor was modified opening the way for the "New Law for the Poor" that replaced foreign aid for the houses of work, where the help was exchanged for the realization of some work. By 20th century, the social and economic consequences of the Second World War leaded to a new support system, the Welfare State, where aid was granted to the population in general and not only to those who were classified as poor (Caballero, 2004).

Observing the national situation, in Colombia subsidies appeared barely in the middle of the last century, with the implementation of Law 90 of 1946 which established compulsory social insurance for workers. This law also granted a subsidy to workers with children to contribute to their household financial burden, starting with a cash bonus which was later added benefits related to health and education and the birth of a new child (Yepes, 2015).

Conditional Cash Transfers and "Más Familias En Acción"

Conditional cash transfers are a type of subsidy, which began to be implemented in the Latin American region in the nineties as a response mechanism to the economic crisis that occurred at that time at overall level in the countries of the region. On the initiative of the nations themselves and international allies such as the World Bank, the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America, it was decided to opt for overcoming the problems by betting on human and social capital. Thus, in 1997 "Bolsa Família" was implemented in Brazil and "Oportunidades" in Mexico, "Bono de Desarrollo Humano" in Ecuador and "Programa de Asignación Familiar" in Honduras during 1998, and in 2000 "Avancemos" in Costa Rica, "Red de Protección Social" in Nicaragua and MFA in Colombia.

MFA is a conditional cash transfers public policy in which use of money is predetermined and expected to stimulate the demand of education and health services, seeking to ensure in the short term the reduction of beneficiaries economic barriers with regard to satisfaction of basic needs and in the long term their social mobility (Benson, 2012).

MFA considers as beneficiaries of the subsidy families with children ages 0-18 and the condition prior to admission is to be in one of the following situations of vulnerability: Forced displacement, which is proven to be recognized before the Unit for Care and Integral Reparation of Victims; Indigenous origin which is documented by being included in the census list of the indigenous community; Situation of extreme poverty that is confirmed by having a registration code of "Red Unidos" (State program to fight multidimensional poverty) or being classified in level 1 of the SISBEN (known in Spanish as "Sistema de Selección de Beneficiarios Para Programas Sociales," in English Selection System for Social Programs Beneficiaries) which for the case of Bogota inhabitants corresponds to a score between 0 and 30.56 (Departamento para la Prosperidad Social, 2018).

MFA allocates two different contributions to its beneficiaries, the first one for health which is a single amount per family regardless of the number of children, delivered bimonthly (6 times a year) to children ages 0- 6; The second for education which is one for each child ages 4-18, delivered bimonthly with the exception of the holiday season at the end of the school year (5 times a year). The conditioning after the inclusion in MFA, to receive the subsidy and continue obtaining it over time is: For health, to show that the child has attended all their growth and development medical controls; For education that the child has attended at least 80% out of the total amount of classes during shcool year and do not fail more than two consecutive school years (Departamento para la Prosperidad Social, 2018).
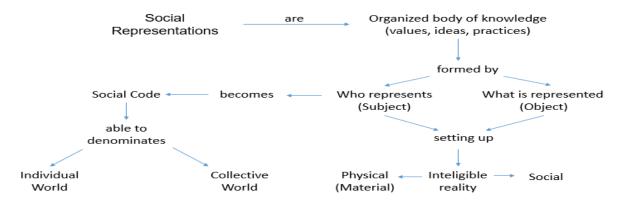
The amounts of money given by MFA in Bogotá for the year 2016 were 68,150 COP (21.74 USD) for health and education, 22,750 COP (7.25 USD) for transitional kindergarten, 11,375 COP (3.62 USD) for 1st to 5th grade of primary, 28,400 COP (9.06 USD) for 6th, 7th and 8th grade of secondary, 31,100 COP (9.92 USD) for 9th and 10th grades and 51,125 COP (16.31 USD) for 11th grade (Departmento para la Prosperidad Social, 2017).

Social Representations Theory

When this investigation project was purposed it was expected to be developed including the perspective of its subjects of study, reason why Social Representations Theory was decided as the mean serve that purpose, since it is a validated method established by social psychology to analyze and interpret in a structured and organized way the position that an individual or collective may have about a particular issue or phenomenon, avoiding information obtained from them to become a simple opinion or speculation, in other words, this is a formal way to understand others perspective.

The social representations (hereinafter referred to as SR), introduced to psychology by Sergei Moscovici, were defined by its creator as an organized body of knowledge used by subjects to make intelligible their physical and social reality in order to integrate themselves to the rest of social group (Moscovici, 1979). SR can also be defined as an organized system of values, ideas and practices, which orient the individual in their material and social world, becoming a socially accepted code to clearly name various aspects of the collective and individual reality (See Figure 1). It is important to bear in mind that the SR arise from the previous experience and the reinterpretation of the same, made by the subject, so they constitute an interpretation of the reality that allows to give meaning to socially significant phenomena, but they are not the reality in itself (Howarth, 2006).

Figure 1
Social Representations diagram. Authors elaboration based on Moscovici – 1979, Farr – 1986 and Howarth, 2006

According to this theory, there are minimum conditions for the emergence of a SR: *Dispersion of information* because subjects have information in different quantity and quality; *Focus* since each one has a particular interest about a topic or phenomenon and its representation depends on it; *Pressure on inference* because in daily life subjects are called to respond on matters of public interest, which ends up becoming a requirement to establish social relationships (Banchs, 1984; Moscovici, 1979).

Context for the Study

This study was motivated for the common interest of the researchers in strategies for poverty, inequity and social segregation overcoming, some of the most notorious social issues of their home country Colombia. This paper belongs to another research that all of the researchers developed together, also regarding the topic of cash transfer, about the perception of people from different regions of Colombia with respect to the possibility of implementing a universal basic income (something inexistent up to now in the country). The results here displayed are expected to serve as raw material for others to continue studying similar topics and to get the attention of policymakers and stakeholders to create awareness of the limitations of current poverty managing strategies. Sebastián Hernández is a neophyte researcher with a master's degree in Health Policy and Management; Wilson Giovanni Jiménez-Barbosa is a permanent professor and long-standing researcher with a PhD title in Social Science, Childhood and Youth; Johanna Acuña-Gómez PhD in Management and Public Policy Modeling, college teacher and long-serving researcher, all of them attached to the institution Universidad de Bogota Jorge Tadeo Lozano, and all of them with undergraduate formation in healthcare careers.

Methods

This is a qualitative investigation, of hermeneutical design. The hermeneutical approach applied to the present study has its epistemological basis in the approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Gadamerian hermeneutics, subjects make a comprehensive appropriation in which they give meaning to what surrounds them, due to the practical access they have to what they try to understand, within a cultural and historical context (composed of trades, educational processes, institutions, etc., Vigo, 2002).

Said comprehension process also occurs due to the tension between the anticipatory and the historical, so when a text is read, one is turning to the anticipatory, that is to say the experience prior to the moment of reading, with respect to what is shown in the text, but it is also resorting to what historically links the reader to the topic in the text, and that is how the questions, motivation and interests arise, allowing one to really approach the text. It is important to highlight that for Gadamer, any attempt to access the meaning of things in a neutral way or free of prejudices, constitutes something utopian due to the inherent reflection of the historicity that the individual possesses (Vigo, 2002). Therefore, this approach allows to generate explanations about how in Bogotá social representations have been created regarding MFA public policy, derived from the historical appropriation that the program has had.

The analyzed sample was assembled with people who live in the city of Bogotá. It is important to mention that the sample sought to cover as many social representations as possible in respect of the chosen public policy, making necessary during the interviewing process the inclusion not only of MFA beneficiaries, but also of people not enrolled in it.

Therefore, the chosen interviewees were divided into two groups: Beneficiaries of MFA found through non-probability snowball sampling, and the non-beneficiaries through non-probability availability sampling.

For the beneficiaries group, the interviewees were asked to suggest possible interview candidates, people they knew also enrolled as beneficiaries of MFA, in order to establish more easily a relationship of trust with other participants, also to have access to people, in some way, considered difficult to identify (Blanco & Castro, 2007). Regarding to the group of non-beneficiary, inhabitants of Bogotá were included, who had at least a superficial knowledge of the program. In both cases, interviewing process implied inquiring information from them until the categories were saturated.

There was no previous definition of the sample size. There is evidence in literature that set a priori definition of the participant's number when sampling in qualitative studies is in essence illogical because it is not possible to determine the number of interviewees sufficient to obtain the understanding of what is still unknown. Besides the issue of the sample, size should not get a disproportionate attention that eclipses other essential elements within the research process (Sim et al., 2018). That is why in the present study the sample was not defined a priori and the end of the interview process occurred when the saturation of the information was reached.

Literature evidence also have registry of several authors who point out that qualitative studies can be conducted with a number of interviewees similar to the one used in this research (11), to find valid results: Between 10 and 20 participants to achieve redundancy or saturation of information (Parse, 1990), between 12 and 20 participants can be called in for studies that require interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

In relation with data analysis, literature points out a sample size between 3 and 10 participants for studies based on interpretative analysis in order to achieve the saturation of categories, clarifying that the appropriate sample size depends of specific factors of the study in question, including the academic level of the researcher (undergraduate, graduate; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009); Between 4 and 5 participants for research of case studies and 2 or 3 for narrative research (Fetters et al., 2013).

The technique for collecting the information was the semi-structured interview, in which initial questionnaires were designed and modified lately as the research progressed, according to the information saturation and the researchers need to obtain new information. The questionnaires applied to the group of MFA beneficiaries had questions about their families, work, economic situation, subsidies as well as questions about their personal experience with the program, advantages, disadvantages, program functioning, what they had observed for themselves and other beneficiaries in their environment. The questionnaires applied to non-beneficiaries inquired about topics such as subsidies in the country, its operation, its administration and about MFA and the impact it has on its beneficiaries.

In both sample groups, the information was obtained by applying the totality of the questionnaire and then returning on the answers that were not clear or deep enough, in order to obtain, either more specific information or peculiar responses to generate a discussion in this regard and delve into the experience of the interviewee.

The tool for information analysis was the Atlas.ti software, which is a gadget specifically designed to arrange, reassemble, and manage data in a systematic way in qualitative research, and the chosen analysis technique was the coding in its three phases, open, axial and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).

Finally, it is important to mention that prior to conducting the interviews, an informed consent was applied to each participant complying with the international protocol of the Declaration of Helsinki, and the current national regulations, Law 1266 of 2008 - Habeas Data (people's right to know, update and rectify the information that has been collected about them) and Resolution 8430 of 1993 (scientific, technical and administrative standards for health research in Colombia).

Results

The interviewing process was conducted in 3 different cycles: The first, with 4 beneficiaries (people who were enrolled to MFA by the moment of the interview or were at any past moment); the second composed by 3 interviewees, only one of them was MFA beneficiary; the third one with 4 people, only one of them beneficiary.

Once the totality of information was obtained (when saturation of categories was reached) its interpretation was carried through applying the coding process that occurred in 3 different stages: *Open coding* by the stipulation of codes, that is established categories, obtained from interview fragments where the selected categories were reflected either as relevant and important because of their appearance frequency within the answers given by all the interviewees, or for its specificity and detail level if it was something that only one of the interviewed people pointed out; *Axial* coding by the aggrupation of categories according to relationships established between them, resulting in new emerging categories; *Selective* coding when information was interpreted in a way that explains the phenomenon that is pretended to be understood through the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 2002).

In the first phase of codification, the open one, 13 codes were established: Benefits, remuneration, control, education, focusing, fraud, income, MFA, migration, permanence, poverty, progress, and subsidy.

In the second phase, the axial, 13 codes were grouped, establishing relationships between them according to their properties and dimensions, renamed some existing and including additional, resulting in 6 categories: *Help*, resulting from joining benefits and subsidies; *Benefits versus control* resulting from pairing remuneration and control, *Rivalry among peers* , emerging from the union of completion, targeting, fraud and permanence; *Acceptance of social status justified in the religion* that contained the poverty category; *Positive incentives* that arose by combining the categories of education, health; *Economic freedom*, as a result of combining the economic freedom and income categories.

Then, some of these 6 categories were renamed, others were regrouped and missing categories were added because of new information that had not been obtained until that phase of the interviews and appeared once questionnaires were modified. Finally, a group of 9 categories was drafted, covering all the relevant information obtained in the interview process. Those categories explained, in a general way, the findings of the investigation, those were: Help, control, rivalry among peers, positive incentives, negative incentives, inappropriate execution of political power, social cohesion, utilization of MFA resources, social behaviors obstructing MFA correct implementation.

In the third and final phase, the selective coding, the information was integrated and interpreted to make a speech emerge from it, which in a logical and coherent detailed way, shows the research findings.

In order to provide a detailed explanation of how codes and categories were built, there is an example of how one of the nine final categories evolved throughout the curse of open and axial coding. During the analysis and interpretation of answers given by the interviewees, there were identified a series of representations regarding MFA and Bogota society overall, those representations were included in the open coding under codes such as social segregation, social and economic breach stimulated by subsidy assignment, problems underlying economic constraints, acceptance of social condition justified in religion, and poverty. Once those codes were set, a common link was identified out of them, and so a category was established, the name of that category was *rivalry among peers*, and the relation shared by the codes grouped under that category was that all of them evidenced the disarticulation between different social groups in Bogota society due to people's economic and social position differences and the difficulty to overcome that lack of articulation.

When the open and axial phases of coding were done, the social cohesion category was obtained as the main one among all those found. This term refers to the degree of articulation or consensus existing amid the members of a society. In the case of Colombia, social cohesion (and the lack of it) is closely linked to the hierarchy of different social groups. There is a unique social hierarchy in the country resulting from a system of stratification that was devised in the 90s as a method to classify housing by stratum (from 1 to 6) to grant subsidies in public services, being 1 low-low, 2 low, 3 medium-low, 4 medium, 5 medium-high and 6 high, depending on their internal conditions (material of the facades, floor and ceiling, etc.) and external (rural or urban area, access roads, etc., Alzate, 2006), but over time it left a mark on people to such a point that this classification became very immersed in the collective imaginary and seemed to permeate distant aspects of housing conditions, but equally quotidian such as interpersonal relationships, the possibilities of education and employability, political ideology and even the way of speaking and dressing, in other words, "individuals in one way or another are the place where they live."

With such a radicalized social order, it is difficult to think of an alignment of interests between social groups when solving problems of society's general concern such as poverty. In Colombia as in the rest of Latin America the fight against poverty is a relevant issue in the political agendas, as evidenced by the Sustainable Development Goals that are part of the United Nations Development Program released in 2016. Conditional cash transfer programs are the main method of combating economic constraints that prevent people from satisfying their basic needs. But being an issue of political interest does not imply that it is, at least not entirely, of interest to all the society, and this is precisely the case of poverty which seems to distress those who lives with it and in it, but not those who surround themselves by it, observing it daily, and in both cases for those who live in poverty and those who do not, it becomes acceptable.

In the course of the interviews, it was possible to identify a series of social representations that showed how MFA is perceived by the social actors studied, and some of them could, in some way, explain the functioning of this public policy and in particular of its implementation phase.

Next, the speech derived from selective coding which displays the final results and findings of this research.

In the categories **help** and **positive incentives** answers like "*It's a good help for me because the little I can offer my children, with that money I can buy many other things*" and "*In the workshops you learn how to treat better the children, and understand that money is better for them to spend in study, for entertainment, besides they also help one in family issues*" showed that MFA is positively valued by its recipients for representing a certain degree of economic freedom at home as well as a family support with pedagogical talks about the relationships (parents and children) within the home.

On the other hand, the category **negative incentives** shows how being part of MFA comes to stimulate in the beneficiaries behaviors that even go against the objectives and guidelines of the policy, answers like "*There are people who are highly dependent, then because they are receiving that help they do not want to get ahead, they do not want to get a job*" and "*I knew and I saw parents that wasted the subsidy money and the children did not have the joy of enjoying it*" explained that the reception of the subsidy can generate in some cases attitudes of heteronomy and disincentive when money is spent in things other than the solution of shortages at home and it is not only wasted but used in a depend way extendedly in time without it entailing some kind of progress or real benefit.

The category **utilization of MFA resources** quotes of the interviewees such as "*They are getting this help and don't take advantage of it*" and *"There were many people who lied, they pretended to be vulnerable and they weren't"* demonstrated that the beneficiaries were not

taking advantage of the money they received, but also that the administration of MFA was having an incorrect allocation of resources because the money ended up in hands of people who were not in vulnerability situation.

This inadequate allocation of resources may be due mainly to weakness in the control and monitoring of beneficiaries by MFA administration because with respect to the **control** category, the answer *"They did not visit me and I think it was necessary"* common in the beneficiaries interviewed demonstrating that those who administer the program had an initial approach during the identification and registration phase of beneficiaries but when the subsidy had been granted already there was no follow-up in time, a gap that facilitated the misuse of the money delivered. Furthermore the existing control was limited to the verification of attendance at medical services and educational institutions, which was insufficient in measuring the impact of MFA, since the fact that a child attends school or his medical check-ups does not guarantee in any way that the services provided are of quality and effective.

In the category **social behaviors that prevent the correct implementation of MFA** affirmations such as *"We never think about others, we always think about ourselves, we want to fill our pockets and the more we have the more we want"* and *"People criticize corruption in the third person, but they don't have moral authority because they are not correct, every time they have opportunity they sneak in buses, they sell trips with a subsidized public transportation card, they falsify papers to access a subsidy, they wangle jobs in public sector because of political influence, then they do not have the authority to criticize, I define inequity as a behavior of not respecting norms"* exhibited that the interviewees perceived their society as an environment that stimulates individual ambitions above common interests and that validates attitudes of corruption and fraud in situations of daily life, so "cheating" becomes acceptable, a fact that explains why some well-designed PPs, at least from the conceptual and normative perspective, turn out having little success among their target populations and their objectives are not reached at the end since the social reality exceeds in certain aspects the conceptions and fundamentals theories proposed to address problems.

It is also important to mention that when talking about PP it should bear in mind that power relations condition and determine the way in which policies take place, this is supported by the information obtained in the **inappropriate execution of political power** where the interviewees said things like *"Things are run a lot around politics and mayors try to get votes through these programs"* and *"The thing about subsidies that the State handles, I would see it as an acting so they can show people they're doing something"* allowing the understanding of how there was predominance of political favoring (which is also related to the incorrect allocation of the subsidy) and that the subsidies were managed to make believe people that politicians were working on social solutions and that the money was invested properly when reality was far from it.

Individuals then, consciously or unconsciously, become part of this favoring dynamic in which "the vote is seen as an opportunity to get favors and not rights," in other words, those who are supposedly elected through democracy, use programs designed to overcome poverty as a simple tool for their electoral campaign to win votes, promising continuity, expansion and improvement of subsidies, thus revealing that there is no real political interest in the use of power for social progress and social mobility, and electors are also doing an inadequate exercise of power because their decision-making power is easily influenced and little conscientious.

One of the most relevant findings in this research is expressed in the category **rivalry among peers** in which quotes like *"In my neighborhood there were moms who had 7 young children, imagine if I was given 150 thousand pesos monthly for my two children, how much those women received"* expressed that, contrary to what can be thought and would be considered normal, there is tension between those who receive the subsidy by necessity and

those who do not need it to meet their basic needs, for having a more solid economy. There was identified in the group of interviewees who were part of MFA (by the interview time or at any given moment in the past) a social tension between 'equals/peers', that is people of similar socioeconomic conditions. Some of the interviewees showed discontent for those who in their opinion received the subsidy unjustly, justifying, for example, that certain people from their immediate surroundings did not needed it, or they received more money than they should had received.

Another important finding was the apparent social validation of corruption, when the interviewees were questioned about who was responsible for the fraud occurring within the program (granting of the subsidy to people who do not meet the profile of vulnerability, favoring relations between administration and beneficiaries) most of them answered it was a state / government responsibility, demonstrating that for them irregularities are acceptable when they came from "peers," that is, everyday people belonging to civil society, justifying that there was not enough control but forgetting that, to begin with, people should act correctly without the need of repressive measures or punishment, assuming their responsibility with public resources.

Because of the above, it can be pointed a notorious lack of autonomy, people's inability to act correctly in the absence of vigilance. Apparently, people have a social representation of the State as a figure of authoritarian power that must control to avoid incorrect behavior and must punish those who commit it, and so in the absence of such control violation of norms is possible, without further consequence. Linked to this, the inexistence of both, social and legal sanction, against situations of fraud is observed which explains the continuity of these behaviors over time.

A peculiar and valuable of being mentioned finding, identified in the interviewed beneficiaries of MFA was their social representation of poverty, even in their economic situation (deprived of many possibilities and material means), they often gave answers such as "Poverty does not exist, is something mental "and" God did not make us poor " which shows that recognizing themselves as poor is something that should be avoided perhaps because it generates segregation and stigmatization.

Discussion

When confronting what was found during theoretical review with what was reported by interviewees, there are several matches between that information coming from those two sources, said concordance is explained next.

Existing studies about MFA show an improvement for beneficiaries in the purchasing power of basic goods like food, clothing, school supplies and transport to school (Barrios González, 2011), those findings were consistent with what was reported by interviewees within beneficiaries group, when they pointed out that cash transfers were helpful for them to contribute in the coverage of household basic needs.

Problems shown in literature in relation with conditional cash transfer programs operation are failures with the focalization and selection of beneficiary families, whether intentional or accidental, outdated, or mismanaged databases. In addition, inadequate monitoring and control of beneficiary compliance with the conditionings they are asked to fulfil to remain enrolled with MFA, have been also reported in studies (Parra Vargas, 2015). Those findings are compatible with situations beneficiaries reported in the interviews, when people faked it to be in a vulnerable position to obtain the benefits of MFA or when a beneficiary family was suspended from getting the cash transfers because the documentation supporting their vulnerabilities started being used for a different family (apparently with certain personal bond to one of the administration workers of the program) to obtain the cash transfer instead.

There is also evidence in previous studies that the program facilitates the irruption of political actors during meetings where administrators and beneficiaries participate, which can lead to pressures respecting to participation and voting of the members of the program. This pressure is supported by the fear of losing financial aid, fear that varies depending on how aware their beneficiaries are of their rights within the program and their knowledge level about MFA logics and legal frameworks (Barrios González, 2011). In respect to that, interviewees stated having consciousness about how MFA is managed in a way that politicians used it as a tool for earning empathy from people during electoral campaigns and as a way to prove they are "actually" doing something to address the poverty issue, in a personal capacity (when in fact MFA is a public policy with nationwide coverage).

Understanding the limitations related to mismanagement of MFA by beneficiaries and administrators, it can be understood why the rest of society, not enrolled in it, has a negative social representation of vulnerable social groups and conditional cash transfer policies, why during the course of interviews some people affirmed that corruption within the program was evident and instead of addressing a solution, it was turning into a way of perpetuating poverty. In relation with that, there is evidence in literature that one of the social perceptions of MFA that non beneficiaries have is that the program seems to be plain assitencialism that encourages laziness among its receptors (Ayola-Betancourt, 2018).

Due to the stigma around beneficiaries who are mistaken for lazy people waiting for state assistance, holding a vulnerable position by own election rather than because of how society and economy are disposed, to earn the required confidence level during interviews with beneficiaries so they spoke openly and honestly, was a limitation for this investigation, furthermore because they feared to lose the subsidy if the information they were providing would end up in the hands of MFA administration.

Returning to the findings of this research, the most surprising for the researchers was the one related to *rivalry among peers*, since it was expected that there would be solidarity and empathy among MFA beneficiaries, a fact that did not occur in some cases, which reinforces certain imaginary negative that society in general has towards the program. These findings have been documented in other studies, where a great distrust of the other on the part of Colombians has been identified, when they are asked about public policies that imply the delivery of monetary resources (Acuña-Gómez, 2020).

Now, analyzing influence of people's social representations in how the MFA policy works , it can be sated that when social representations of those involved with MFA are positive, or in favor of its existence and its objectives, it would allow its implementation to occur normally, given that they will be able to articulate it to its context, it is the case of representations such as "*MFA is a program that helps its beneficiaries*" and "*MFA provides opportunities for progress*"; If there are negative social representations or against MFA, the implementation will not proceed normally but will be hampered since the stakeholders do not sympathize with the guidelines and objectives of the policy, that is the case of representations such as "*MFA becomes dependent on the people* " and "*MFA makes people have more children and do not want to work to continue getting help*"; In the case of representations such as "*If politicians steal why people do not*" or "*If my neighbor does why I do not,*" these representations modify the course of implementation of MFA because although the benefit is being granted to someone, there are problems yet such as the actual non-compliance with the linkage profile, the diversion of resources allocated by MFA and the weakness in the monitoring and follow-up of beneficiaries.

In addition, it must be bear in mind that Bogota society has very specific social representations about issues such as politics, education, health, subsidies, among others, particularities that must be put into consideration by policy makers and policy managers, during all stages of the cycle of public policy, in such a way that they can achieve their objectives,

give an effective response to problems and have enough impact in the social reality. Besides it is important to understand that Colombia has a very unique social hierarchy so public policies should be planned and executed taking into account this reality, to avoid looking exclusively for compliance of their objectives but also to achieve social cohesion, instead of stimulating the already existing tension between the different groups of society and even the segregation of some of them.

It is possible to speak of generalization of the results obtained throughout this research, in populations with actors, contexts and policies similar to those of the groups included in the studied sample. Another aspect that reinforces the possibility of generalizing the results is that this research was developed under a rigorous methodology that allows to affirm the validity of the findings, their quality and therefore an impact on the area of knowledge to which this study belongs (Ventura Leon, 2017).

It is expected that the results described here that correspond to the impressions of minority populations within Colombian society will be taken into account by policymakers for the possible reformulation of MFA or other public policies that involve the delivery of conditional transfers as an approach to fight against poverty. It is important to highlight that in the initial phases of the construction of public policies, research such as this one are of great value because they provide elements of analysis that constitute opportunities to elicit the active participation of the population in the construction of public agenda and public policy.

As recommendations for future research, the researchers found two lines of deepening that would be interesting to explore, the first related to the tensions between MFA beneficiaries due to lack of solidarity between them, and the second related to family transformations that occur after a certain time having received MFA benefits.

Conclusion

It can be affirmed that social representations have an influence on the implementation stage of the public policy MFA, because they are an inherent part of the social reality of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, orienting the way people perceive it, make sense of it and articulate it to their daily basis, so regarding to the question: *What is the influence of the social representations on the implementation of the public policy MFA in Bogotá*?, this research concludes that the social representations have potential to allow, hamper or modify the process of implementing this public policy, since interpretations of the social reality have an inherently subjective nature that leads to the different stakeholders (beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, administrators, executors) having a peculiar and specific interaction with it.

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Author Note

Juan Sebastián Hernández Monsalve, MSc, has worked as a healthcare professional and researcher of health and social topics. He has participated as speaker in the Latin American Biennial of Children and Youth in Manizalez- Colombia and in the International Congress of Americanists in Salamanca, Spain. Please direct correspondence to sebashmonsalve@gmail.com.

Wilson Giovanni Jiménez, PhD, has been a longtime researcher and professor with wide experience in the academia that involves over 15 years of teaching and more than 40 papers published in Colombia (his home country) and abroad, in index journals that are ranged from topics such as health and life quality to social research. He had also participated several times in academic congresses both national and international as speaker and he has directed several thesis for students of undergraduate, masters and PhD programs. Now a full-time college faculty member in Universidad de Bogota Jorge Tadeo Lozano where he teaches, researches, directs thesis works and evaluates degree thesis, all of the above within Health and Administration related programs. Please direct correspondence to wilsong.jimenezb@utadeo.edu.co.

Johanna Sareth Acuña Gomez, PhD, has been a long-term researcher and professor with an extended background on teaching and investigation mostly related to health and social studies. She has been involved within the national and international scene with numerous papers published in index journals and she has participated in congresses lectures. Now full-time director of academic audit office for Sergio Arboleda University. Please direct correspondence to jsareth77@yahoo.com.

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