Social representations of a group of ex-combatants on compliance with the Peace Agreement

Representaciones sociales de un grupo de excombatientes sobre el cumplimiento del Acuerdo de Paz
Representações sociais de um grupo de ex-combatentes sobre o cumprimento do Acordo de Paz

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Abstract

Introduction: the peace process in Colombia, the signing of the Havana Treaty and its compliance, have been the subject of various investigations. Due to the long history of the conflict and the multiple attempts at pacification, the Peace Treaty represented an important opportunity to resolve deep-rooted social problems in the affected territories. **Objective:** the objective of the study was to describe the social representations of ex-combatants about the Peace Treaty. **Methodology:** a basic qualitative design based on observation, interview and triangulation of sources was implemented. **Results:** the main results point towards a social representation of variable polarity according to the specific points, the predominance of ideas and beliefs related to the construction of the future, a favorable appreciation of the transition and resistance related to the historical problems that generate the conflict. **Conclusions:** it is concluded that the representation of ex-combatants is marked by the idea that peace, as was the armed conflict, is a process that entails advances and setbacks.

Key words: Conflict research; Economic and social development; Peace agreements; Peacebuilding; Reconstruction; Tolerance.

Resumen

Introducción: el proceso de paz en Colombia, la firma del Tratado de la Habana y su cumplimiento, han sido objeto de diversas investigaciones. Debido a la larga historia del conflicto y los múltiples intentos de pacificación, el Tratado de paz representó una importante oportunidad para resolver problemáticas sociales arraigadas en los territorios afectados. **Objetivo:** el estudio tuvo como objetivo describir las representaciones sociales de los excombatientes sobre el Tratado de paz. **Metodología:** se implementó un diseño cualitativo básico basado en la observación, la entrevista y la triangulación de fuentes. **Resultados:** los principales resultados apuntan hacia una representación social de polaridad variable según los puntos específicos, el predominio de ideas y creencias relacionadas con la construcción del futuro, una apreciación favorable de la transición y resistencias relacionadas con los problemas históricos generadores del conflicto. **Conclusiones:** se concluye que la representación de los excombatientes está marcada por la idea de que la paz, como lo fue el conflicto armado, es un proceso que comporta avances y retrocesos.

Palabras clave: Acuerdo de Paz; Consolidación de la paz; Desarrollo económico y social; Investigación sobre los conflictos; Reconstrucción; Tolerancia[1].

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1 Tesauro de la UNESCO.

Resumo

Introdução: o processo de paz na Colômbia, a assinatura do Tratado de Havana e a sua implementação têm sido objeto de várias investigações. Devido à longa história do conflito e às múltiplas tentativas de pacificação, o tratado de paz representou uma importante oportunidade para resolver problemas sociais profundamente enraizados nos territórios afectados. **Objetivo:** o estudo visou descrever as representações sociais dos ex-combatentes sobre o tratado de paz. **Metodologia:** foi implementado um projeto qualitativo básico baseado na observação, na entrevista e na triangulação de fontes. **Resultados:** os principais resultados apontam para uma representação social de polaridade variável consoante os pontos específicos, o predomínio de ideias e crenças relacionadas com a construção do futuro, uma apreciação favorável da transição e resistências relacionadas com os problemas históricos que geraram o conflito. **Conclusões:** Concluise que a representação dos ex-combatentes é marcada pela ideia de que a paz, assim como o conflito armado, é um processo que envolve avanços e retrocessos.

Palavras-chave: Acordo de paz, Consolidação da paz, Desenvolvimento económico e social, Investigação de conflitos, Reconstrução, Tolerância.

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INTRODUCTION

The formal history of the Peace Agreement begins in 1964 with the beginning of the armed conflict between the State and various territories based on the struggle for land (Ríos & González, 2021; Ríos, 2017). Efforts to achieve a peace process were revitalized in the 1980s, marked by the first negotiations between the government and the most important armed group in the country, the FARC-EP guerrilla (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejército del Pueblo). After more than five decades, a final consensus was reached between the parties, which contributed conceptual elements and new perspectives to the study of peace treaties (Ríos & González, 2021).

Although the treaty signed is considered one of the most multidimensional and one of the best structured, due to the fact that its objectives focus on aspects of Colombian culture, socioeconomic structure and history (Ríos & González, 2021), its results have been questioned. Among others, there are arguments in the literature related to the presence of historically consolidated beliefs pointing to the armed conflict as a legitimate way to achieve objectives (Hernández Zapata et al., 2019); the violent acts linked to the conflict and the proliferation of armed criminal groups in peripheral contexts (Ríos & González, 2021); the disparity in solutions and progress based on the concept of territoriality and the reincorporation of the parties to the conflict into a framework of legality (Pacheco Ruiz et al., 2020; Ríos, 2017).

In order to understand the achievements and vicissitudes that have marked both optimism and pessimism regarding its fulfillment (Arias-López et al., 2022), it is necessary to understand the key points established in the agreement and its historical roots. As already mentioned, among the historical roots of the warlike confrontation and the current state of the post-conflict are altercations between state and municipalities over land ownership and governance (Ríos, 2017); the policies of amnesty and disarmament of the insurgents (Arias-López et al., 2022); the representations, imaginaries and beliefs associated with the legitimacy of the struggle (Hernández Za- pata et al., 2019); environmental protection and sustainability (Salazar et al., 2022); as well as the processes of inclusion, peace education and reintegration (Gómez Tabares, 2019; Pacheco Ruiz et al., 2020).

As can be seen, any attempt to understand the causes and effects of the conflict must be based on an inter- and even transdisciplinary approach. Although the common thread followed up to this point has been guided by social, historical and geographical aspects, as they are the most common in the analysis of the peace process and the study of the results of the dialogue (Díaz et al., 2021), the effects have been evidenced in other dimensions of the country's daily life.

Studies conducted with a socio-health approach have shown an increase in the prevalence of psychiatric and clinical-medical disorders (Ramos et al., 2018; Tobón et al., 2016); negative experiences related to anxiety, depression and stress (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2016; León-Giraldo et al., 2023); the increase in the consumption of substances (legal and illegal) and their association with geographical settings and the intensity of the conflict; as well as the psychosocial damage diagnosed in individuals, families and communities (Borges Machín and González Bravo, 2022; Durán Sánchez & Guaje Mendoza, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2021; Rodríguez Cajamarca, 2022). It is therefore necessary to focus on the confluence, integration and deconstruction of the triggering factors and their consequences, from the perspective of the people involved in the conflict and their positions on them in the post-conflict scenario.

As will be discussed later in the literature review section, for a better understanding of the

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In order to understand the background, several studies have focused on a broad spectrum of actors or agents involved in or affected by the conflict (Salgado Chamorro, 2022). The most prominent are patients suffering from mental health disorders; displaced persons; people in situations of vulnerability; children and adolescents linked to armed groups; ex-combatants; as well as political and environmental leaders (Gómez Tabares, 2019; Luna-Amador et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2021; Salazar et al., 2022; Zuluaga Pinzón, 2021).

However, an examination of these studies allows us to understand the importance of a pro-found approach to the experiences of the different protagonists. This approach does not imply a detriment to the exploration of the causes, but rather moves the lens towards the way in which these protagonists represent themselves and have experienced the peace process. Beliefs, ideals, perceptions, are integrated into the way in which the former combatants approach their personal-historical context and reveal the cosmovisive transformations, as well as the persistence in relation to rights, resistance and historical struggles.

In this way, the study seeks to approach the unique configuration of ideas, needs, motives and behaviors that express the way in which former combatants have cognitively and affectively processed the peace treaty. In addition, it seeks to explore how they have perceived the reincorporation process and their particular evaluation of the transition. In this sense, the following research problem is posed:

What are the characteristics of the social representation of the Peace Treaty in a group of ex-combatants of the concentration zone of the Agua Bonita Village in the municipality of La Montañita-Caquetá?

This research question, approached from a deductive to an inductive approach, favors a better understanding of the current context based on the ontological examination of the complex networks of factors associated with the conflict, the peace process and its fulfillment. The main importance of studying this particular problem is that it makes visible the network of meanings, attitudes and behaviors of the former combatants based on their new situation.

The final purpose is to explore in the voice and socio-psychological meanings shared by this group, how the processes of acceptance and compliance with the Peace Treaty have taken place in the concentration zone of the Vereda Agua Bonita in the municipality of La Montañita-Caque- tá. Among other aspects, it seeks to understand how the ex-combatants have perceived their new status, the processes of coexistence, governmental support, respect for guarantees and non-compliance with the agreement.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review, as noted above, yielded a wide diversity of approaches and research topics. The latter have been divided into three historical processes and their relationship (history of the conflict, peace treaty fragmentation, post-conflict); they have focused on territories, population groups, communities and individuals; as well as exploring issues related to human rights, coexistence and re-insertion, attention to those affected by the conflict and diagnosis of the state of the transition scenarios.

For a better presentation and analysis of this background information, it was decided to organize them according to

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three macro-approaches identified. Therefore, they were studied from the geographic and territorial, sociocultural and historical, as well as biopsychosocial and socio-health approaches. The intention is to generate a network of codes to facilitate a better understanding of the singular representations of ex-combatants as a framework for comparison from the general.

Before beginning the review of the antecedents ascribed to these three main approaches, it is necessary to make a convenient clarification. The analysis of the background information was guided by the main nodes or groups of information offered in the texts, which does not mean that these respond to a single approach or examine a single facet of the complex web of factors related to the research problem.

Geographic and territorial approach

In this approach, several background studies were focused on aspects related to geography, geopolitics, governance, resource management, and the environment, among others. These studies also explore issues related to agriculture and livestock, food security and the differences between territories in terms of key aspects of the Colombian scenario.

In this direction, Prem et al. (2020) studied the advance or decline of forest areas using satellite data. This study pointed out the importance of the peace-building process in reforestation, while pointing to the value of state action and the strength of legal institutions. As a result, it highlights the need to integrate an environmental and sustainable approach to the peace process as a way to improve the quality of life in the territories.

A similar study by Salazar et al. (2022) focused on the relationship between social factors and the environment. For these authors, there is a significant relationship between poverty, violence, inequality and environmental deterioration, a fact that was highlighted after the change of government in 2018.

Another important factor addressed in this study was the economy, as the authors found that, during the peace talks, both wealth and general well-being, as well as environmental indicators, showed their best results. Similarly, Banerjee et al. (2021) recommend deepening the aspects derived from strengthening the economy, with emphasis on limiting deforestation and increasing productivity indices in the agricultural sector.

Another study focused on the relationship between peace, conflict, power relations and social welfare in the territories was conducted by (Acero & Machuca, 2021). These authors investigated the implementation of policies for the control of illegal crops, as well as their advances and setbacks in terms of general policies. Based on data collected through in-depth interviews and document review, these authors found a marked setback from changes in the balance of power and its negative influence on the peace process in the affected territories (Acero & Machuca, 2021).

Another important study was conducted by Koopman (2020) in relation to the socio-spatial distribution of different groups and how studying this dispersion could facilitate the understanding of different factors that cause inequalities. According to this author, in order to understand what the peace process means, it is necessary to approach the relationships established between gender, race, sexuality, and inclusion policies and agendas (Koopman, 2020).

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Under this same approach, an already referenced but transcendental study was carried out by Diaz et al. (2021). These authors argue that, although government programs have an important potential for dialogue and transformation in peacebuilding, the main contribution in the case of the Colombian process is offered by resilient communities (Diaz et al., 2021). However, the literature shows the need to promote entrepreneurship and the link between university, government and community (Ripoll Rivaldo, 2023).

This study not only questions the celebrated example of the Colombian peace project, but also points out the inadequacies and potential of the territorial peace approach. Judging by the results presented, this territorial approach promoted participation, territorial unity and co-construction of the peace process through the interactions of the different actors and their ways of coping with disappointment in the implementation of the agreement. These results were similar to those found by Barrera et al. (2022), who point out the threats posed by the lack of regional consensus and unfulfilled promises by the State.

To conclude the review of the antecedents located in this group, a previously referenced study on the representations of peace and human rights in the discourses of Colombian activists is recovered (Georgi, 2022). The main result found by this author is that there is no homogeneous concept of peace, which implies understanding the process in terms of political agendas and judicial and legislative apparatuses with a regional approach (Georgi, 2022).

The study of this background allowed establishing a geographic and territorial framework for the understanding of the factors affecting ex-combatants, their participatory processes and daily life. As perceptions of the peace process and support for it are conditioned and spatially distributed (DeMeritt & Pulido, 2019), this background provides the basis for a better interpretation of the representations, perceptions and experiences of the veterans of the concentration zone of the Vereda Agua bonita of the municipality of La Montañita-Caquetá regarding the Peace Treaty.

Socio-cultural and historical approach

In this approach we found antecedents characterized by a thorough exploration of cate- gories and topics of a profound social nature. With greater emphasis on historical, legal and sociocultural aspects, the research in this section analyzes aspects related to the historical causes of the conflict, the opposing positions and worldviews, the consequences of the conflict, as well as the different aspects of the peace-building process.

In this sense, Ríos (2017) analyzed the structure of the Peace Treaty, its historical roots. In this work, the author reviews five nuclear points for Colombian society, especially for the most affected territories and ex-combatants: rural reform, political participation, end of the conflict, drugs and victims. For this author, despite the difficulties in complying with the treaty, it is necessary to emphasize that its design provides the basis for future developments related to greater decentralization, citizen protagonism and participation, the strengthening of democracy and the harmonious convergence of political positions based on the acceptance of plurality.

In a similar vein, Ríos and González (2021) explore the implications of the Peace Treaty through the lens of increased violence. With a territorial focus, this article examines the linkages between violence and the

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The main factors that have contributed to the violence against demobilized combatants are geographic location, organized crime and illegal crops, as well as the limited strength of the state's institutional structures. This text is of vital importance because it demonstrates that the dynamics of violence are strongest in the national periphery. It also presents specific data to understand the peace-building process in the context of the research presented (Caquetá).

Another noteworthy study was conducted by Ahumada (2020), who especially analyzes the process of stagnation and regression after the initial advances, with emphasis on the agrarian reform. Like other scholars on the subject, this author points out the etiology of the conflict with regard to land, the strategic nature of the peripheral struggle and the structural weakness of the State's action in the territories in conflict.

Among the main results of this study are the analysis of social and political emergencies in the Colombian scenario, the balance of political power and its influence on the peace process (Ahumada, 2020). With an approach that starts from history to understand current decisions and positions regarding the implementation of the Peace Treaty, the author exposes the polarity of the positions and their declared antagonism, which threatens the positions of dialogue and coexistence, as well as the weakening of the guarantees in the transition.

Another significant study in this approach is presented by Rico Revelo and Sottilotta (2023). This study, originally published online in 2020, pays special attention to the beliefs and attitudes of Colombian citizens regarding the treaty and the peacebuilding process. Based on a phenomenological approach in context, the authors identified beliefs that could affect peacebuilding in the long term.

Among the main contributions of this study is a deep understanding of beliefs according to social status related to the conflict (displaced, victim, unaffected), related to socioeconomic strata (the authors used six), and to age groups (Rico Revelo & Sottilotta, 2023). In short, the research showed the persistence of three groups of beliefs related to barriers to peace (history of the conflict and costs of peace, emerging aspects in the national political agenda and disinformation), disillusionment regarding the peace treaty and its vision as an end point in contradiction with the need for a peace-building process, as well as beliefs appreciated as evidence of progress in the peace process (social changes, awareness of the costs of the conflict and support for transitional justice) (Rico Revelo & Sottilotta, 2023) (Rico Revelo & Sottilotta, 2023).

With a similar gnoseological approach, Rico Revelo et al. (2022) conducted a non-experimental, descriptive study in which they applied a questionnaire aimed at exploring the participants' representations regarding forgiveness, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and the transformations caused by conflict in people's worldview, among others (Rico Revelo et al., 2022). The results of the study showed the prevalence of feelings of coexistence over feelings of trust, as well as a positive influence of the former on the latter.

This study highlights the importance of organizing accompaniment and dialogue processes to subsequently achieve joint participation and the desired peaceful coexistence. Another cardinal aspect is the authors' analysis of resentment, which they state affects the relationship between the two groups.

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coexistence and trust, but declare that their release constitutes an important process for the achievement of long-term progress in peacebuilding (Rico Revelo et al., 2022).

As in the previous approach, it should be noted that the antecedents were identified and selected according to a thematic division that responded to the cognitive interests of the authors. This implies recognizing that several of these studies could fit into other approaches, precisely because of their comprehensive approach to a complex reality.

Therefore, the study of these antecedents highlights the influence of historical and cultural aspects, as well as their reproduction and transformation in the worldviews of the people affected by the conflict. They also provided a better basis for interpreting the results, since these studies do not weight the historical (in the sense of the unspecific) over the individual and examine the effects of the process of historical evolution and social changes in the lives of different groups and populations.

Biopsychosocial and socio-health approach

As in the previous approach, several of the antecedents identified can be analyzed from other perspectives; however, they are placed here because of their focus on the pathological, health-genic and psychosocial aspects of the effects of conflict and peacebuilding on individuals, groups and communities. The emphasis is on the health-illness continuum and human well-being.

An important study identified was conducted by Garciandía Imaz and Samper Alum (2021). These authors studied the influence of the armed conflict on interpersonal relationships and the generation of trauma based on the secondary experience of military wives. An important conclusion of this study is that the armed conflict generates psychosomatic consequences and psychopathologies in people who must deal with the trauma and consequences of the conflict in those who participated directly (Garciandía Imaz and Samper Alum, 2021).

Another significant study was conducted by a large group of researchers in order to categorize situations of vulnerability, symptomatology and psychosocial damage in displaced persons (Barchelot Aceros et al., 2021). The research, which included a broad sample and age distribution, studied the potentially traumatizing events experienced by displaced persons based on the sex variable and pointed out the occurrence of multiple situations of this type and the consequent polytrauma, the high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder and the frequency of multiple forms of violence (Barchelot Aceros et al., 2021).

For their part, Piñeros-Ortíz et al. (2022) studied the social determinants of health in a group of displaced persons, which made it possible to explore not only psychopathological symptomatology, but also the influence of circumstances on the mental health disorders present in this group. With a descriptive scope, the study demonstrated the existence of socioeconomic and socio-labor factors that acted to the detriment of mental health, the limited institutional support received, the importance of social support networks, as well as the urgency of employing analytical approaches for the study of the consequences of the conflict on the health and general well-being of those affected (Piñeros-Ortíz et al., 2022).

In a similar vein, a team of researchers was interested in the presence of mental health disorders as a consequence of displacement (León-Giraldo et al., 2023). This study, although focused on the displaced population during the period prior to the signing of the Peace Treaty, offers a clear vision

with respect to the mental health problems experienced by people affected by the conflict. The main problems identified were depression, psychosomatic disorders, suicidal ideation, and variables such as sex and maximum education completed were identified as factors that increase the probability of suffering from these disorders (León-Giraldo et al., 2023).

In a general sense, this approach points to contrasting ideas such as the humanization of care (Ca- tota Tiban & Guarate Coronado, 2023; Martikainen & Sakki, 2023) and attention to the emotional aspects of coping and peace education (Nelson, 2021;Vidal Barrantes, 2023). Other aspects assessed were the clinical-medical attention to psychosocial factors, the needs of people acting as caregivers and the quality of services (Cachi & Valdés Rojas, 2023; Kancheff, 2022; Kitchiner et al., 2019; Martínez Rodríguez et al., 2022).

As can be seen, there is a wide constellation of factors that are studied as a direct consequence of the armed conflict and that are part of the daily life of individuals, groups and communities. The way in which these experiences affect the perceptions and representations of veterans with respect to the Peace Treaty, its implementation and results, constitutes the main contribution of this background group.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research approach adopted was qualitative, as it is aimed at understanding the meanings attributed by people to facts, phenomena or objects, from an inductive and flexible perspective (Taylor et al., 2016). Although there are several types of qualitative research, they present specific objectives that represent advanced epistemological positions and great complexity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this sense, the basic qualitative research approach was selected, used in various fields of study, whose main interest is the examination of the construction of the participants' reality from an interpretative framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the study presented, this posture allowed contrasting the re-presentations of ex-combatants, their components and the social context in which they are produced, with respect to the results achieved in previous research. Therefore, the scope of the research was exploratory-des- criptive and its results constitute the basis for future applied research.

The study was carried out in the department of Caquetá, in the municipality of La Montañita in the village of Agua Bonita, as it is the concentration zone of former FARC-EP combatants. The population identified as subjects of the study were former combatants in the process of reinsertion or reincorporation.

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), sampling in qualitative research goes beyond the identification of subjects and includes the what, the when, the where and the units of observation and analysis. In this sense, the units of analysis, with a flexible design and oriented to the construction of the ex-combatants, were identified in the Matrix of factors that condition the social representation of the Peace Treaty according to the literature review.

As for the identification and selection of participants, the help of gatekeepers or cus- tomers was required to superficially explain the research objectives. Typical sampling was used because

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The aim was to learn about the standard way in which ex-combatants represented the Peace Agreement and its fulfillment, but it was necessary to support this initial design with a snowball strategy to facilitate participation. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), these two types of sampling are among the most common in qualitative research.

Finally, the sample consisted of 10 key participants, whose testimonies were re-collected through an in-depth interview based on five main indicators. In addition, an observation inventory was elaborated for the study of the context and the contrast of the results. The indicators were developed as a result of the triangulation of the literature analysis and initial coding, the perspectives of the researchers and the objective of the study.

Indicators

- Agrarian reform and food security.

- Citizen security and legality.

- Post-conflict, citizenship and reincorporation.

- Violence, criminality and the remnants of the conflict.

- Harmful effects of conflict and post-conflict resilience.

In both cases, the main qualitative research variable was social representation. In the study, this was defined based on the considerations of McFee (2016), who establishes that the classic va- riant comprises or encompasses a system of values and practices. In addition, these must be understood within the subjects' frames of reference (groups, worldviews and interactions), so they are multiple and can be distinguished. Thus, social representations mutually condition each other and transform the symbolic relationships of people with respect to the object of presentation (McFee, 2016).

The information collected was organized in two databases, the first composed of the transcripts of the interviews and the second with the transcriptions of the observation units, methods and field notes. Due to the volume of information collected, a sequential strategy was used for data analysis, in accordance with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who suggest that the best way is to analyze case by case and purchase notes until saturation is achieved and no new data appear.
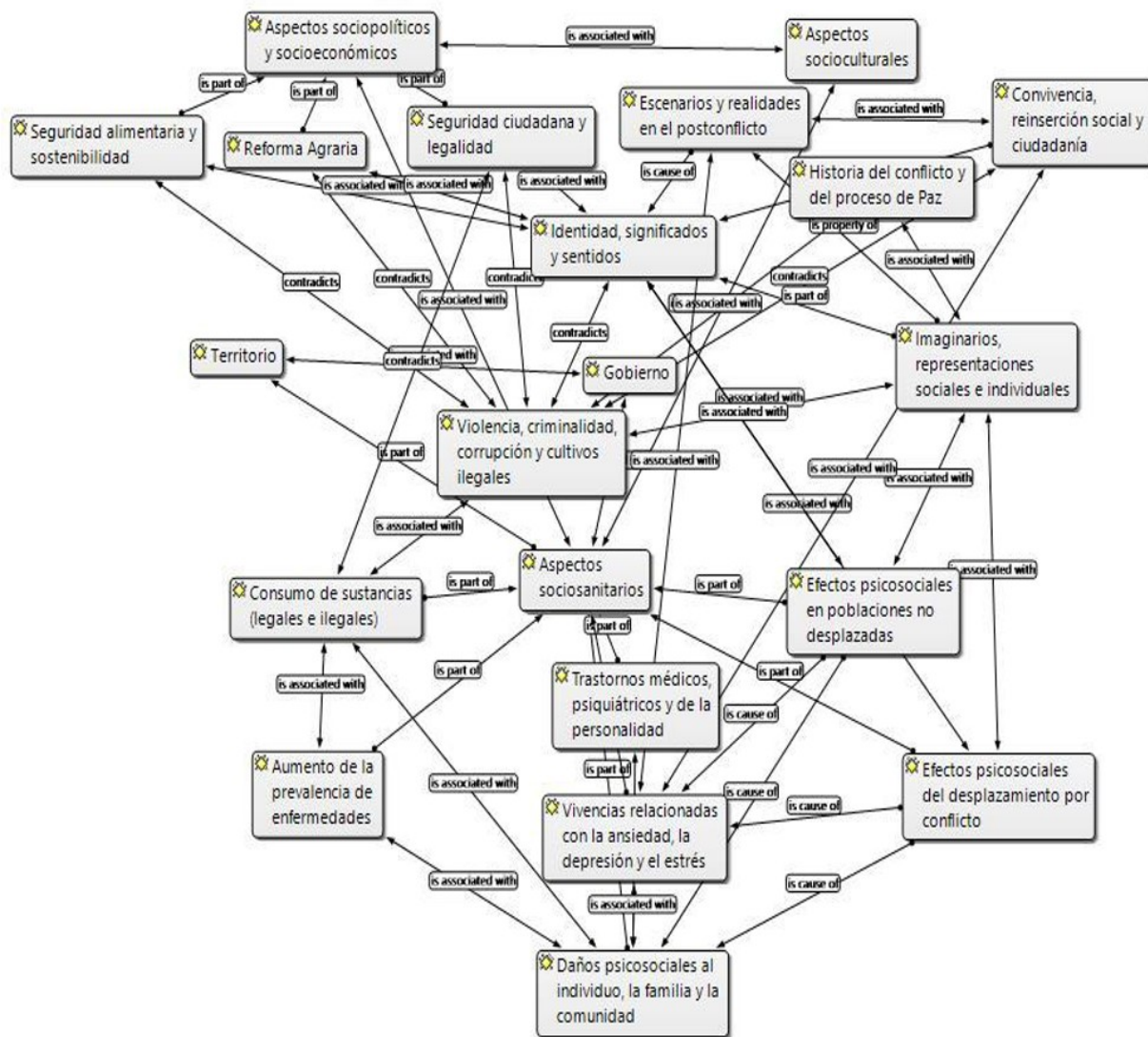
In order to make sense of the data, we worked on the basis of a process of raw data coding, analysis and categorization, which allowed for a second review and coding. In this way, the data were reduced and the codes were interpreted, which made it possible to elaborate four syntheses that express the way in which the social representations of the ex-combatants are structured. The analysis and presentation of the results was carried out with the support of ATLAS.ti version 9.0 software and an ethical orientation towards the discussion of the results.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the study of the main antecedents identified, a matrix of factors was drawn up that expresses the relationship between the components of each approach (see Figure 1). This synthesis allows a comparative exploration of the perceptions and representations of the ex-combatants. In this way, in addition to exploring narratives and experiences, it was possible to promote more complex contextual analyses and achieve a better understanding of the stories and narratives offered by the research participants.

Figura 1.

Matriz de factores que condicionan la representación social del Tratado de Paz de acuerdo con la revisión de la literatura.

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

This matrix, although it did not mean renouncing the inductive nature of the research, did constitute an important resource to support the field work of the researchers. In addition, it provided a basis or frame of reference for contrasting the notes and memos in the field diary.

With regard to the results of the analysis of the interviews, three major categories were identified that made it possible to give meaning to the codes in which the social representations of the ex-combatants were structured. These three categories were Future and development (1), Problems and reconciliation (2), Social responsibility (3).

The first category, although its denomination or name suggests a projection into the future, appears expressed in codes related to the past in the participants' responses. What McFee (2016) identified as the relationship between social representation and historical memory, appeared in the participants' responses regarding one of the great promises of the Peace Treaty, the solution to one of the genesis of the conflict: land.

According to the participants, the agricultural fund constituted a solid proposal to promote the progressive development of rural areas in the territories undergoing the post-conflict process. For them, this purpose of the agreement would make it possible to resolve uncertainties affecting farmers and small landowners with respect to legal, constitutional (differentiated in the meso and macro visions) and local government support.

Similar to Koopman (2020), the different ways in which belonging to groups could affect the representation of the Peace Treaty were observed in the participants' responses. In this case, differences were identified in the responses and meanings given to the peace process according to the different groups or forms of categorization, for example: fathers and mothers - without children, small landowner - without property, displaced - reincorporated.
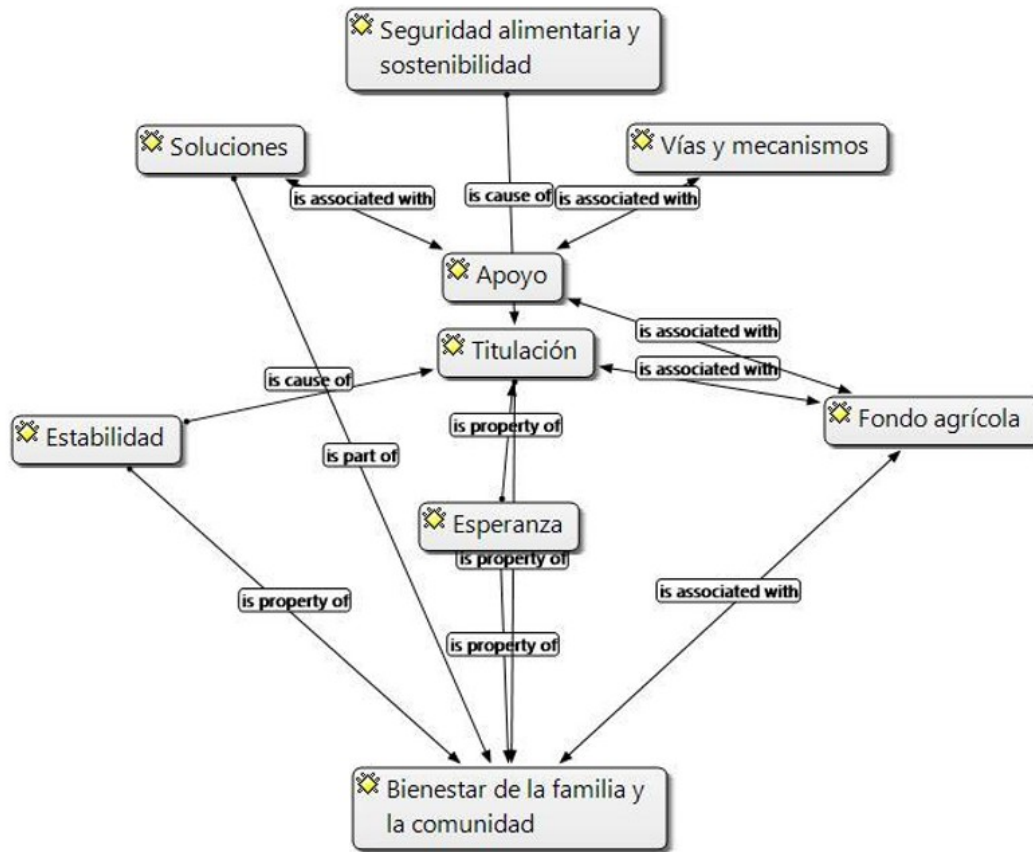
A fundamental aspect in this category was food security for the individual, the family and the community. Marked by the conflict's own histories, historical memory takes shape in the narratives of the participants through concerns related to agrarian reform, land delivery and land titling in the framework of security and protection. Security appears as a key code that takes various forms in the discourse, but in this category it is associated with mechanisms that should ensure hope, stability and a promising future for families and the community (see Figure 2).

The second category revealed the importance of commitment to the peace process. Aspects related to the new life of the ex-combatants are frequently mentioned. Among the symbolic aspects that most intensely mark the representation are the exchange of weapons for crops (mainly pineapple), the personalization of the enclave (construction and decoration) and respect for the historical memory associated with the conflict.

This last aspect is expressed in a complex network of meanings that integrates codes such as historical boundaries, socioeconomic model, teamwork and external support, especially the impact of resources from the international arena and the support of the EU. The discourse showed a transition from initial euphoria and optimism about the agreement and the cessation of the armed conflict to a more critical view of reality.

Figura 2.

Categoría Futuro y desarrollo.

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

This critical view should not be understood pejoratively, but rather implies recognizing that achievements have been made, but also that barriers and challenges persist, with two main directions identified. The first has to do with preparation for the peace scenario, which is associated symbolically and in practice with education and training processes, both for ex-combatants and future generations. The second, with the relationship between promises and fulfillment, where the State and local governments are perceived in terms of the support they have provided to the transitional process, mainly in terms of sufficient or insufficient. Both directions have been contrasted in the literature and future studies are required (Mora Pontiluis et al., 2023, Sanabria Martínez, 2022).

These terms are not exclusive to the transition scenario, but are evaluated by former combatants from a comparative logic. The long history of empty promises, loss of social leaders, scenarios of forced displacement and involuntary recruitment constitute a kind of intangible threat to the future.

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Thus, two essential dimensions are highlighted in the discourses to understand the damage caused by the conflict. In the first place, the damage to health (physical and mental) appeared according to the different groups to which they belonged, and there was a prominent mention of the minefields and the efforts to disarm them, a fact that has a symbolic counterpart. Secondly, the historical conflict with state forms of government and political polarization.

According to the studies by Rico Revelo & Sottilotta (2023) and Rico Revelo et al. (2022), feelings of coexistence and reconciliation predominate over resentment, but resentment does not disappear and conditions the peace process. These results are fundamentally associated with armament, the costs of peace and reconciliation.

As noted in the analysis of the previous category, social representations are conditioned by the comparative analysis of the causes of the conflict, the promises included and the process of satisfaction with the agreement. Two of the main dissatisfactions were linked to the granting of benefits to people or companies that are not included in the classification criteria (mainly vulnerability) in the peace agreement, as well as to the guarantees offered and their fulfillment process (especially in the livestock sector).

Although both issues are not as aggravated in the context as in others, they function as symbolic barriers due to the possibility of their appearance. Although these perceptions are anchored to their territorial character, already contrasted in the literature, they reveal an important aspect of the representation, which has to do with the national historical identity and the holistic representation of the conflict, which, although primarily territorial, also has an extraterritorial component brought together by the value systems and ideologies that converge (and clashed) in the conflict.

In general, there is a complex network of meanings built on the possibilities of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace building. Although the symbolism is still associated with the historical evolution of the conflict, there is a maturity in the understanding of a key idea: peace is also a process, as opposed to old attitudes anchored in the notion that the Peace Agreement would erase the evils that led to the beginning and continuation of the conflict (see Figure 3).

The third category, Social Responsibility, was the most difficult to define, as it not only groups together codes that are social and institutional (vertical downward), but also includes codes that exemplify the way in which ex-combatants, their families and the community as a whole relate to the social structure. These two directions indicated by the category generate an important platform for individual and social development, as well as for the peace process.
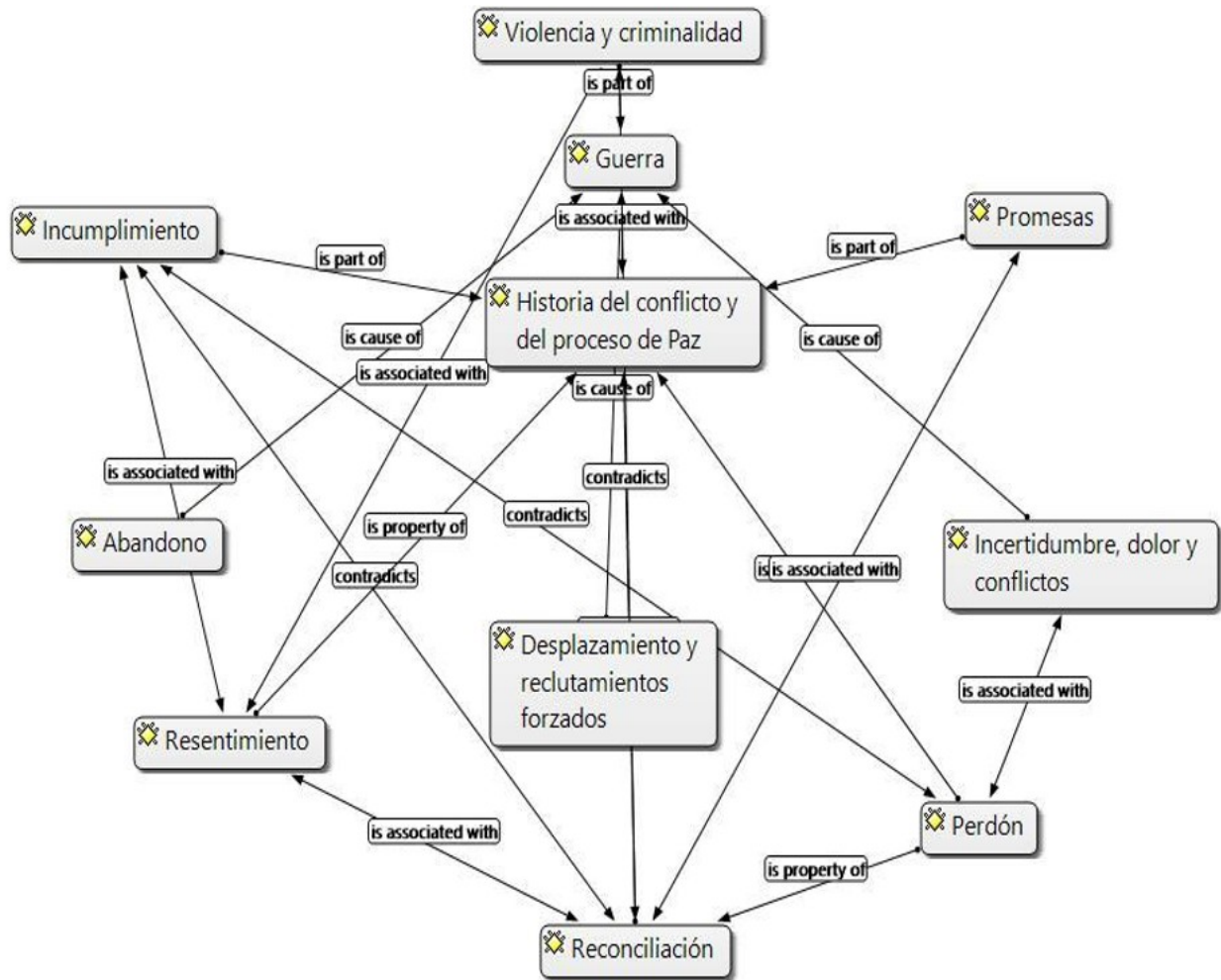
Aspects related to the necessary integration into the structure, the reversal of decades of institutional neglect, integration into supply and trade chains, the importance of revitalizing and progressively diversifying the economy, among others, were highlighted as premises for community development. As can be seen, these processes, even from a staunchly liberal perspective, are influenced by the community-territory-society relationship, which in turn is conditioned by the "stigma of the ex-grillero" and land ownership as a form of possession that generates identity.

Likewise, elements were identified that mark the way in which the members of the community, especially the ex-combatants, interact with the environment, the social organization that they themselves build, and the way in which they interact with the environment.

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Figura 3.

Categoría Problemáticas y reconciliación.

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

and the society to which they belong through various links. Thus, it was identified that the feelings of rootedness, group and community identity, benefit from the common history and discipline learned during the conflict, which has generated a sense of belonging not only to Vereda Agua bonita in the municipality of La Montañita-Caquetá as a physical space, but also as a sociocultural space with tangible and intangible components.
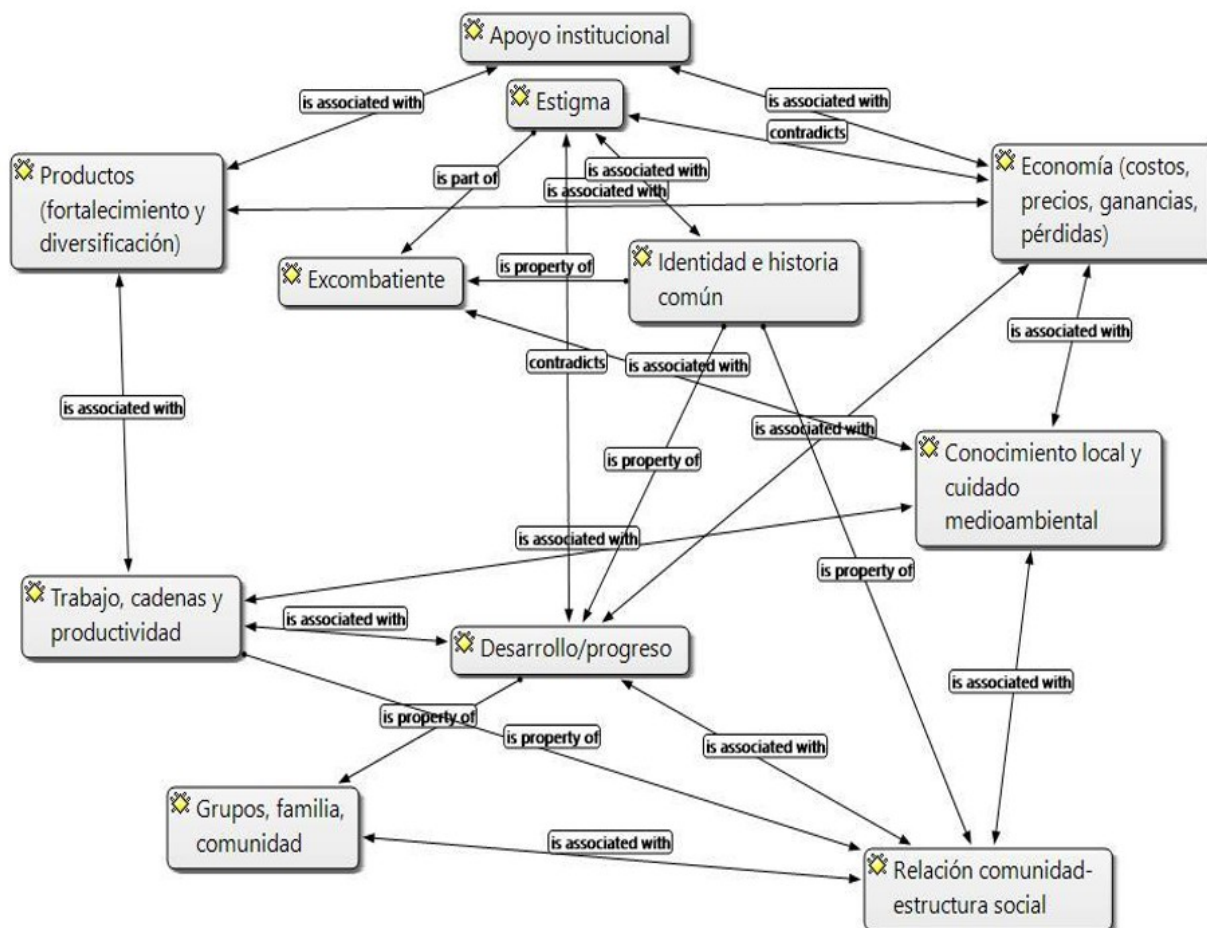
One of the most important examples identified was the symbology related to colors. This marks an important form of appropriation of physical space and its conversion into a space of its own. The transition from white dwellings to decorated homes or the metaphor of the "explosion" of colors, offer in the narratives of the ex-combatants an account of the process of appropriation, of commitment to the future and represent a kind of bridge between the past and the future through the transformation of the sidewalk.

The convergence of the two directions is one of the main barriers perceived by the

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The two-dimensionality of the ex-combatants, given by the possibilities that objectively and from their understanding, they have to progress. However, in this double dimensionality, the elements that demonstrated the progress of the community were also appreciated (see figure 4).

Figura 4.

Categoría Responsabilidad social.

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

From the very beginning of the fieldwork, it could be seen that the concentration zone in La Montañita evidenced the implementation of agricultural systems and a social organization under construction, which demonstrated the results of the settlement and reincorporation process. However, it is necessary to point out that the social representations explored are by no means unitary and reveal common and singular stories within the framework of the needs of those who relate them from their position as ex-combatants.

Perhaps the common element, or at least the most relevant, is land. Land condenses in different ways the meanings and senses that ex-combatants attribute to the Peace Treaty, to its fulfillment and the evaluations that both have formulated. Similar to the analysis of the instigate/mediate dichotomy by (Rico Revelo & Sottilotta, 2023), the study identified the polarized nature of accept/reject that ultimately governs the alignment of the representations.

However, it is vital to emphasize that in a certain way the idea has been consolidated that peace, as well as conflict, is not only a state but also a process and, therefore, involves progress and setbacks. It is therefore suggested that, although the social representation of the Peace Agreement acts as an important conditioning factor, there are other elements linked to the peace-building process that intervene as positive mediators in the reincorporation of ex-combatants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The process of drafting and signing the Peace Treaty, as well as its signing, revealed a complex set of historical, territorial, identity, political, ideological and even worldview relations. The long history of attempts to put an end to the armed confrontation and the dissatisfaction with the measures historically taken also played an important role in the perception of the people involved in the conflict, as well as in their reincorporation and post-conflict life.

The study identified that the adaptability and resilience of the ex-combatants was not only conditioned by personal factors and their unique perception of the Peace Treaty. In addition, social, cultural, political and economic factors were diagnosed that, directly or indirectly, affect the way in which they represent the fulfillment of the agreement.

The most important result was the centrality of land in the worldview of the ex-combatants and its associations with all the processes that mark the transition. Among the most prominent were land reform, the different ways of shaping identity, education as a means to promote development, economic sustainability and the representation of the future. These results could be valuable in the analysis of public policies, private initiatives and other efforts aimed at accompanying the transition of ex-combatants and their communities in post-conflict times and during peace-building.

The findings support the need to continue the in-depth study of psychosocial factors that, in an interdependent relationship, favor a better understanding of the peace-building process, peaceful reintegration and transitional justice. In addition, they allowed a better understanding of the representation of the conflict and its conditioning on individual, group and community behavior. However, further research is required with mixed designs that transcend the primarily inductive character of the present study, as well as the inclusion of new categories from a biopsychosocial approach with a view to integrating the factors addressed in a common conceptual framework or explanatory theory.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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