



Institutional sheltering through the child's perspective

Atención institucional desde la perspectiva del niño

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Abstract

The current multiple case study was performed in the context of institutional sheltering, it aimed at identifying the perception children have about the sheltering process. Four children that were sheltered in a state shelter located in the north region of Brazil participated in this study. For the data collection were used: questionnaires for social demographic characterization, semi structured interview, drawings, and field diary. The main results indicated: 1) the children are aware of where they are and the reason for sheltering; 2) They report understanding the leisure and basic care activities as positive points of the institution; 3) as negative aspects they highlight the aggressiveness among the children, and the absence of family members. The current study presents the possibility to establish dialog with the children, taking their opinions into consideration, for they are capable of understanding and giving insight about their own situation.

Keywords: Institutionalization; Shelter; Perception; Child development

Resumen

Este estudio de caso múltiple se realizó en el contexto del cuidado institucional, con el objetivo de identificar la percepción que los niños tienen sobre su proceso de cuidado. Cuatro niños fueron parte de la investigación, alojados en un albergue municipal en la región norte de Brasil. Para la recolección se utilizaron: cuestionario de caracterización sociodemográfica, entrevista semiestructurada, dibujo y diario de campo. Los principales resultados indicaron: 1) Los niños comprenden el espacio en el que se encuentran y las razones para recibirlos; 2) Informan que entienden las actividades de ocio y cuidados básicos como puntos positivos de la institución; 3) Como punto negativo, destacan la agresión entre los niños y la ausencia de familiares. El estudio presenta la posibilidad de entablar un diálogo con los niños, teniendo en cuenta sus opiniones, ya que son capaces de comprender y opinar sobre su situación.

Palabras clave: Institucionalización; Refugio; Percepción; Desarrollo infantil

INTRODUCTION

The Child and Adolescent Statute (Brasil, Child and Adolescent Statute—ECA) of 1990, determines that children and adolescents have specific rights. Thus, it is the obligation of the Family, Community and State to ensure these individuals the Right to Life, Health, Freedom, Respect, Dignity, Family and Community Life, Education, Culture, Sports and Leisure (Brasil, Child and Adolescent Statute—ECA, 1990). However, when any of these above-mentioned rights are violated, the protective measures take place, among them, in the seventh position, is the institutional sheltering as provisory and exceptional measure used as a transition to the family reintegration, and as last option, placement in a foster family (Brasil, Child and Adolescent Statute—ECA, 1990).

Nonetheless, sheltering institutions commonly have difficulties to promote family restructuring for the reintegration to take place, or in case of destitution, for adoption, which results in long sheltering periods (Moreira et al., 2013). For that reason, it is crucial that measures previous to sheltering are implemented, hence avoiding the ruptures caused by sheltering.

At first, and usually, it will be in the family context that the child will develop rules, limits and roles, however the family is not the only institution that influences the process of identity construction and the promotion of development (Penso & Moraes, 2016). It is understood that in cases where children are sent to sheltering institutions the workers of these locations become reference figures for the care of these subjects and will play an important role in their development.

It is a fact that the human being has the potential to develop in different environments, being able to adapt to different realities (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). For the author, the sheltering institution can be a context that promotes development, as long as it ensures to the subject in development the opportunity to move and explore the environment, with objects that allow him/her to engage in spontaneous activities, availability of educators who are receptive to interact with the children in varied activities, and the availability of a figure with whom the child can develop safe attachment.

Therefore, sheltering institutions can be understood as promoters of development for they act as a support network for children and adolescents (Patias et al., 2017), granting their emotional and basic needs such as feeding (Gabatz et al., 2019), enable the presence of a main caregiver and ensure stability in care (Debnath et al., 2019). Thus, foster care educators are seen as protective and developmental figures for foster children (Pessoa et al., 2020).

Through the ecological perspective, considering the non-determinist and systemic logic, it is possible to understand sheltering institutions as ecological environments that promote development for being a context where the relations are established and maintained. On the other hand, long-term presence in sheltering institutions that offer only collective care and enable little possibilities for meaningful connections, may present major risks to physical, psychological, and/or moral integrity (Cavalcante et al., 2014; Moreira, 2014).

Furthermore, the longer the sheltering period is, the greater the possibility of breaking the bonds between sheltered children and their family, also, the younger the child, the shorter should the sheltering period be, as the child is in a crucial period of its development, in which the first attachment figures are essential (McLaughlin et al., 2015; Moreira, 2014).

Children and adolescents interviewed in Jordana Calcing and Silvia Benetti (2014) describe going to the sheltering institution as the most stressful experience lived by them. That suggests that, even though there's a social comprehension that institutionalization is to remove them from a vulnerable environment, the actual getting into an institution is negatively seen. As the separation of the child from its family and community can be considered an impairment to its development. Besides, it is noted that the disruption doesn't happen only for social aspects, but also includes an entire identity that is dissolved upon sheltering.

In the daily institutional work, the life histories of children are being deleted, either for causing suffering or for being considered the same as all the others, thus losing the singularities of these subjects who are reduced to "sheltered children" (Moreira et al., 2013). In such an environment where collectiveness is lived so intensively it is essential to guarantee the right to individuality for the sheltered children, in a way that their life history is respected, hence granting resources for valuing the identities of subjects under development (Cintra & Souza, 2010).

Listening to the sheltered children is important for understanding their desires and anxieties, as to help them assimilate the situation they are living, hence avoiding that they blame themselves for being away from their families (Silva & Arpini, 2013). However, inside the institutions there's a disbelief in the ability of the children to understand the situation they are going through, as if they needed to be spared from the process in which they are implied, in a way their voice is constantly ignored regarding their choices and desires for the future (Moreira, 2014). With that said, the children, even though they are the subject of most interest, are the least heard (Moreira et al., 2013; Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2012).

Throughout the sheltering process there is a rare and almost absent number of opportunities for the children to share their point of view about their conditions, opinions, and assessments, how long they are staying there and what will happen to them (Bernardi, 2010; Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2012). Because of that they might make hasty assessments of detachment from the institution or inadequate return to the original family, or even believe in a longer sheltering than the necessary, which will repercuss in the construction of the child's subjectivity without paying attention to what they have to say (Azevedo & Sani, 2017; Moreira et al., 2013).

It is important to understand that children are endowed with wisdom and a view of the world which are important elements to be taken into consideration when assessing their subjective living (Bernardi, 2010). One of the main forms to assess the real needs of children and adolescents who live in institutional sheltering is giving them the right to speak up, in a way they can report their own feelings and perspectives (Bernardi, 2010; Delgado et al., 2019; Gabatz et al., 2010). It is also crucial to highlight that for the child to be able to give their opinion about what would be the best for them, it is imperative that they are aware of their own situation, in other words, without really understanding the reality they are inserted, they are not able to provide a substantiated opinion (Oliveira, 2015).

For many years, the studies carried out with children were based on observation. It is fundamental that, in addition to this technique, it is essential to listen to this subject, who is capable of reflecting on his or her own experiences (Bernardi, 2010; Rosado & Campelo, 2011). Throughout the time such reality was changed and studies started to give voice to these subjects as protagonists of their experiences (Calcing & Benetti, 2014; Conzatti & Mosmann, 2015; Gabatz et al., 2010; Lauz & Borges, 2013; Lira & Pedrosa, 2016; Pessoa et al., 2020; Trivellato et al., 2013).

It is understood that to be able to intervene in the reality of children and adolescents it is important to know them, that is why it is crucial to thoroughly investigate the perceptions children have about their institutional experiences, to consequently think of possible strategies to make this experience less harmful to their development (Calcing & Benetti, 2014). Facing that, the current study aimed at identifying the perception children have about their sheltering experience. In that matter, it was sought to find out the understanding children have about the place they are, the reasons for sheltering, and their perception of positive and negative aspects of the institution.

METHOD

Design

This is a multiple case study with qualitative design, which allows understanding complex social phenomena and allows an investigation to preserve the significant characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2001). The study sought to know the perception of children in institutional shelter as to where they are, the reasons that led to their shelter and their perception as to the positive and negative points of the institution.

Participants

Four children with ages between five and eight years took part in this study. Data was collected from October 2017 to July 2018. The criteria for selecting the subjects were: children sheltered for at least one month and clear speech. The exclusion criteria used were children who had been in foster care for less than a month and who had not yet developed speech in an understandable manner.

Studies aimed at giving voice to children are usually conducted with participants who are seven years of age or older (Azevedo & Sani, 2017; Calcing & Benetti, 2014; Gabatz et al., 2010; Lauz & Borges, 2013; Rosado & Campelo, 2011). The present study, due to the fact that the institution welcomes children from zero to six years old, embraced the challenge of working with a younger age group in order to investigate the level of understanding presented by these individuals about the situation experienced by them.

Environment

The study was conducted in a municipal childcare institution in the Metropolitan Region of Belém, which takes in children aged zero to six years of both sexes. The institution operates as an institutional shelter, which is defined as a service that offers temporary shelter to children and adolescents away from family life, with an aspect similar to that of a residence, offering a welcoming environment and institutional conditions for care with standards of dignity (Brasil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009). The interviews with the children were conducted individually in the playroom of the institution.

Instruments and materials

Children characterization form

Created from the study of Lidia Weber and Lúcia Kossobudzki (1996) and adapted by Lília Cavalcante (2008) to assess the psychosocial condition of children that live in institutional sheltering and similar institutions. The form consists of questions arranged in four axes: identification of the child – 17 items; family situation – 8 items; institutionalization process – 27 items; health – 19 items. For this study only the item in personal data and process of institutionalization were used due to relevance to the topic.

Drawing

Sheets of A4 paper, color pens, and coloring pencil.

Field diary

The field diary consists of a material in which it is possible to describe and organize the considerations from the inclusion of the researcher in the data collection environment. It is possible to characterize the participants, reconstruct previous dialogs, describe the physical space, report important occurrences, and describe activities. Therefore, it can be useful for recording and analyzing experiences and observations, but also to organize the production of knowledge (Afonso et al., 2015).

Procedure

Authorization for performing the study at the institution

A contact was made with the state sheltering system, special protection secretary of high complexity, in order to present the research and request permission to enter the premises of the institution, also to have access to the children's files. The project was submitted to the Research and Ethics Committee (Protocol n° 568.256) simultaneously, the institution received the request for the study to be performed there.

Assessment of institutional environment

The ecological approach was used, which proposes that the researcher is inserted in the ecological context in which the participant of the research is, thus being able to acknowledge the reality of the subject. Therefore, it is possible for the researcher to be part of the environment and experience it as well as the relationship present in it (Rosa et al., 2016). To that purpose the daily experience of the shelter was assessed through regular visits, observation, and partaking in daily activities.

Data collection

The children's characterization forms were filled by the researcher in the premises of the institution with the information from the children's files, also, when needed, additional information was provided by the technical staff. In addition, individual meetings were held with the children in the playroom for interviews in a playful way, with the help of drawings as a trigger activity for the conversation of the researcher with the children.

The researcher would ask the children to draw the space they were and then the following questions were asked: 1) what place is that? 2) Do you know why you came over here? 3) What do you like better over here? 4) What don't you like here?. During the visits to the place some notes of pertinent situations were taken for further discussion (field diary).

Data analysis

The sociodemographic data of the children were systematized from Excel for better data visualization. For the interviews, Bardin Analysis Content was used (Bardin, 2011). The emerging themes from the children's speech were: understanding about sheltering position; valorization of leisure activities; maintenance of family bonds; relations among peers.

RESULTS

Child A

The child was 5 years old at the time of collection, female, and had two sisters in the institution (children B and C). She had four other sisters in addition to those who resided in the institution. Before being referred to the foster care facility, she lived with her mother and her two sisters, and the reason for her foster care was the fact that she was alone at home with them, with no legal guardian. In addition, after the reception, it was found that the mother was a drug user.

The child was out of school due to the lack of vacancies in schools near the foster home, so she spent most of her time in the institution, with little access to outside leisure activities. Despite this, she received visits from her mother once a week, with whom she had good interactions. And she had already been in foster care for four months at the time of collection.

In relation to the ludic interview with the child, when asked about her understanding of the place where she currently resided, she said she didn't know what that place was, indicating that no one had ever talked to her about it.

Despite this, when questioned about what had motivated her to go to the institution, she reported the situation that had occurred at home.

As for the factors she considers positive in the institution, she reported about ludic activities, such as: playing, drawing, telling stories, sleeping, and eating. As for the negative points in the institution, she referred to the children who hit her and her sisters.

Child B

The child was 7 years old at the time of collection, female, and had two sisters in the institution. Her family situation and reason for foster care are the same as child A. Different from her sister, she was inserted in the school system; it is worth mentioning that the child was only inserted in the school system after her fostering, a factor that made her constantly report difficulty in keeping up with her classmates.

As for the ludic interview carried out with the child, when asked about the place where she currently lived, she was able to name it as “shelter”, as well as tell the situation that motivated her foster care. Regarding the factors she considers positive in the institution, she reported about the playful activities and also basic care issues, such as: “playing and having lunch every day”.

As for the negative factors, the child verbalized “being alone, without my mother, crying and missing my mother”. This factor was also evidenced in the daily interactions recorded in the field diary, which concerns the strong attachment that the three sisters had with their mother and the consequent difficulty in understanding the reasons why they stayed at the shelter instead of being with their mother.

Child C

The child was 8 years old at the time of collection, female, and had two sisters in the institution. Her family situation and reason for being sheltered are the same as child A. With one addition, that in her medical record there was a suspicion that she had been sexually abused by a maternal uncle. Similar to child B, she had been inserted in the school system upon entering the institution, and also reported difficulties in keeping up with her classmates, a factor that caused her frustration in relation to school.

In relation to the data obtained in the ludic interview, it was found that the child understood she was in a “shelter” and was also able to report what had happened for her to be sheltered. As for the positive aspects of the institution, she talked about the playful activities, such as drawing.

What she considered negative about the space, she said, were the people who beat her sisters, defined by her as other children who were sheltered. It is understood that being the oldest of the three sisters and having the habit in her family context of taking care of them when there was no legal guardian present, she assumed a protective role of the younger ones. It was also notable the strong relationship that the three sisters had.

Child D

The child was six years old at the time of collection and was male. He had been fostered for two months at the time of the survey, but the reason for his fostering was the transfer from another shelter, where he had spent eight months. Prior to his first foster care stay, he lived only with his mother and his two-year-old sister, who was also a foster child. The reason for the first foster care was the imprisonment of the mother. However, at the time of data collection, she was already free and was visiting the shelter.

Regarding the data collected through the ludic interview, the child had an understanding of the place where he currently lived and could relate the reasons that led to his foster care. The positive points of the institution for the child were the material items, such as “toys, Ben 10 clothes”. The negative factors, on the other hand, were the other children who beat him.

DISCUSSION

Understanding about sheltering position

It was possible to notice in the children's own words that most of them know they are in a “Shelter”, only the youngest child stated that she did not know. This factor is considered positive, as it is essential that the child knows the space where he/she is inserted, for this reason the Technical Guidelines (2009) emphasize that on the arrival of a new child to the institution, one should try to present the physical and social environment to assist in the process of habituation of the child to the institution.

The children investigated pointed out understanding that they are in a foster care institution. These results diverge from the study carried out by Alex Pessoa et al. (2020) where the children they investigated, in the age group of four to nine years old, did not recognize the place where they were and neither the reasons that led them to the shelter. One possible explanation for the divergence may be linked to the type of foster care; in the authors' study, the children were in a foster family and in the present study they were in an institutional shelter. Thus, we can infer that the type of foster care is a variable that

can influence the access and knowledge of information to the fostered children.

In the present study, it was noted that all the children interviewed were able to report the reason for being sheltered. The study performed by Maria Moreira et al. (2013), corroborated what was found, once the authors reinforce that children are capable of understanding their situation. The study performed with children aging from 8 to 11 years old shows that they can report the reasons that took them to institutional sheltering (Gabatz et al., 2010). However, as they are stories surrounded by suffering and disruption of bonds, usually they avoid addressing this theme in a direct manner and bring them out during ludic interactions.

Though, the study performed with 10 children at ages that ranged from 6 to 12, showed that three of the interviewed children did not know the reason for their sheltering (Conzatti & Mosmann, 2015). Therefore, the data of the present study and the literature showed that the level of comprehension of their situation might not be associated with the age of the selected children. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that that has happened due to differences on how the institutions work, for some of them have a better dialogue with the children

Nonetheless, a difficult matter to be addressed is about the length of stay of these children in the institution, usually, this is uncertain, it depends on information that is still waiting for trial, hence, not even the staff has access to it. Because of that, these aspects can generate concern in the child by facing the uncertainties, taking into account that they are constantly anxious for having doubts about what is going to happen to them.

This reality was registered in the field diary, at a moment of informal conversation between the researcher and the coordinator of the institution, a child who is at the shelter for 8 months and is going through the process of destitution, reaches the coordinator and asks; “Aunty, the person is already coming to get me?” the coordinator replied saying that it was still necessary to solve some issues for that to happen and asked if the child had understood, however, she did not give any verbal response, only looked at her for a while and then went away (Entry of field diary, November 2017). In that situation it was noticed an element of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1996) in the child’s life. That is demonstrated in the fact that the decision concerning the possible return to the family or the length of stay in the institution to be on the hands of a judge, in other words, the child’s future is interlocked to that decision.

Valorization of leisure activities

As positive aspects of the institution they described leisure activities as playing, drawing, storytelling, and also daily activities as sleeping and eating. The study of Pedro Lira and Maria Pedrosa (2016) also highlights ludic and daily activities as important moments in the daily life of these children, for they promote the development and establish social interactions.

The plays are seen as moments for the children to establish effective exchanges and strengthen the affective bonds (Pessoa et al., 2020), in addition to being a moment of free expression in which they can reveal positive and negative aspects of their daily lives (Kappler & Mendes, 2019). Preserving the play in the sheltered children's lives presents itself as a positive aspect, which suggests that the subjects experience well-being in the institution and great development (Conzatti & Mosmann, 2015).

Maintenance of family bonds

It was noticed through the data collected the importance that fraternal bonds play for children during the period in which they remain in foster care, which can be considered as a protective factor to both their physical and emotional integrity. The moment the child is inserted in the foster care institution can be conceived as an ecological transition, as he/she starts to experience a new microsystem. In such a way that the joint fostering of siblings will help in this adaptation, because, as characterized by Bronfenbrenner (1996), the fact of entering this new place with a relational dyad will help this to happen in a more harmonious way.

The quality of the bonds that the children had before the shelter influences their subjective perception of well-being. It is essential to ensure stability and continuity in these bonds (Schütz et al., 2015). Thus, family visits are also a relevant data to be considered, since, through this strategy, it becomes possible to preserve and strengthen the ties between family members while the child is in foster care (Brasil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009).

The visitation in the context of institutional shelter also favors the return of the child to family life after the continuous work of professionals and authorities of the rights assurance system with the family members (Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2011; Siqueira et al., 2011).

One aspect pointed out as being negative of institutionalization was missing the family caregiver. The study conducted by Edinete Rosa et al. (2010), pointed out that during the interactions with the children accommodated in the space,

it was possible to notice that they demonstrate the desire to return to their family of origin. This factor suggests that, even though in the institution their physical and emotional needs are met, they still want to return to their family life. Moreover, although the children's parents are often perpetrators of rights violations, they are still relevant affective figures (Gabatz et al., 2019; Lauz & Borges, 2013; Moreira, 2014).

The children go through ambivalent situations with regards to their parents, because they still have traces of feelings of attachment, surrounded by the consequences of the suffering they have experienced (Gabatz et al., 2010). Besides, children have an ideal image of their family, despite the fact they have lived in situations of negligence, those family members are still seen as figures of tenderness and protection (Conzatti & Mosmann, 2015). Therefore, it is important to keep the family bonds through visitations and joint sheltering of siblings (Pessoa et al., 2020).

It was identified throughout the data collection process the persistence of conversation among the workers of the institution about the sheltering of the children and family matters. Those conversations would happen sometimes in the presence of the children with their justification that the children wouldn't understand what they were saying. The document that rules the sheltering services (Brasil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009) emphasized the importance of how the workers see the original family because their perceptions might have influence on the relationship between the children and their family throughout the sheltering process.

The consequences of what is heard by the children might be noted in the following situation, during a drawing activity with the researcher child A draws a planet and says "in this planet lives my mother, she is going far away from us, because she doesn't care about us, she only cares about men" (Entry of field diary, January 2018). It is noticeable that this speech has characteristics of a dialogue between adults, it's not possible to precisely define where the child had access to such a speech, also, it is clear the influence such perception will have on the relationship of the child and its mother. Once the child absorbs negative information about an important figure for them, such as the mother, that will bring suffering and also distancing from the maternal image they had until then.

The conception of a negative image about the children's relatives may come from the fact that in this institution the educators have a rare and almost absent contact with the children's relatives. That situation is alarming because the institution is a place that aims at strengthening the family bonds (Brasil,

National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009). The work done with focus on the family is shown in the official documents as essential for the promotion and defense of the children's rights (Brasil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009; Brasil, Relatório da infância e juventude, 2013).

Throughout history it was created a culpability stigma towards the family of children and adolescents that live in shelters (Cintra & Souza, 2010; Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2012). They are seen as neglecting, which difficulties to develop affection for their offspring and responsible for violating these children in a direct or indirect way. Therefore, there is a disbelief from the workers of sheltering institutions regarding the possibilities of the families to create their offspring adequately (Lauz & Borges, 2013; Moreira, 2014). On the opposite direction there is a speech that highlights family living as positive and crucial for the healthy development of those subject

It's common for the professionals to experience negative feelings towards the children's family members that acted violently, however, such point of view does not bring any benefits for the developing children (Gabatz et al., 2010; Gabatz et al., 2019). Hence, it is crucial to maintain a continuous capacitation process of all the professionals of the system that deal with those subjects for them to understand how beneficial it is for the children to have close relationship with their family, also on the other hand, how it is unfavorable to spread a negative point of view regarding their family (Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2011). It is important to emphasize the proximity between the professionals of the institution and the families are essential for granting the rights and duties presented in the current legislation (Silva & Arpini, 2013).

Among the elements that corroborate the difficulty for the family reinsertion and consequent detachment of this subject are situations that involve from the micro to the exosystem, in which the children are inserted. Such factor reaffirms what is addressed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1996) when he recognizes that the actions developed in any of the environments in which the child is inserted, directly or indirectly, will reflect on his/her life.

As an example of the elements of the microsystem associated to this factor, we have the relational difficulties in the dyad family caregiver-child. Regarding the events concerning the mesosystem, the literature shows that the difficulty to establish a good relationship among professionals of the institution and the child's family member is understood as an aspect which hinders this reinstatement (Mastroianni et al., 2018). Besides, the preconceptions that the professionals have about the child's family members can be seen as aspects that dif-

difficult the process of reinstatement in the family at the rate they allow their creeds and beliefs to guide their actions (Furtado et al., 2019; Lauz & Borges, 2013; Patias et al., 2017). Because of that, it is necessary to create listening spaces and capacitation for these professionals with the aim to deconstruct this rooted point of view about the children and their family members (Cintra & Souza, 2010; Siqueira & Dell’Aglío, 2011).

The socio-economic vulnerability in which the families of the sheltered children are usually subjected might be seen as one of the aspects that impair a successful family reintegration. Moreover, when a good relationship is established between the socioassistencial network and the shelter institution, that might be seen as a mesosystem relationship, which might help a successful family reintegration (Rosa et al., 2010). Moreover, regarding the exosystem you have the idle judicial processes which interfere directly in the process of family reintegration (Cintra & Souza, 2010).

Relations among peers

As a negative aspect, most children reported the matter of physical aggression among them. Such reality was also perceived through the field diary, since aggression among children was present. However, other studies have shown that inside the institution the children broaden their social support network, the established relationship among the children promote “emotional support, play, and protection” (Kappler & Mendes, 2019; Rosa et al., 2010; Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2012, p. 395). In addition, the children that stay in the institution demonstrate to miss the ones that have already left (Rosa et al., 2010).

Aggression is part of the human constitution, strongly linked to the survival of the species in its original stage of evolution. Not all aggressive behavior is harmful, it may be associated with the establishment of hierarchy, alliances, and bonds. In the investigated institution, the presence of aggression occurs mainly by the division of materials, this fact is associated with the need to offer care that preserves the uniqueness of children (Rosa et al., 2010; Trivellato et al., 2013). This reality was also perceived in the institution investigated in this study, as it had difficulty in ensuring the uniqueness and individuality in relation to the children’s belongings; individuality in relation to the children’s toys and clothes was absent, and all items were used collectively.

That could be noticed in the field diary during a discussion to decide who would keep a doll, a child (sheltered for 8 months) says to the other one with whom he/she was arguing “when you leave here will you really give me this doll?”, with this sentence she also exposes the lack of expectation that he will leave the institution before the other child (Entry of field diary, march of

2018). It is important to emphasize that all the children that were sheltered when the mentioned child entered the space, have already been disconnected from the institution, which might have influenced the state of anxiety and hopelessness in the child that is still in the institution, for being aware that others will go and he/she will stay.

In an environment marked by collectivities as institutional sheltering for children, dealing with the individuality/singularity of each subject presents itself as a huge challenge to be overcome (Rossetti-Ferreira et al., 2012; Trivellato et al., 2013). The sheltering institution must provide the children a work that ensures their individuality, for that, it is crucial they have their personal belongings, the right to privacy, and maintenance of their own life stories. Hence, it is possible to help their identity formation, understanding of what is individual and what is collective, and the respect to their life history (Brasil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Social Assistance Council, 2009).

FINAL REMARKS

This study aimed at identifying the perception the children have about their Sheltering process. It was identified that the children can understand the physical space where they are and the reasons for being sent to that space. However, they continued anguished for not having access to information concerning their process and future perspectives.

They see some aspects of their routine in the space as positive, as ludic activities and feeding. However, the aggression among the children, and the lack of individuality, absence of family members, are situations that cause discomfort and they classified them as the main negative aspects of the institution.

The present study presents the possibility of establishing a dialogue with children as early as five years of age, since they are able to understand and have an opinion about their situation. With that it is possible to provide them with the maintenance of their life history, in addition to providing them with knowledge and updates about their sheltering process, because children are able to understand it, which is frequently overlooked by adults.

The variable and inconstant length of time which the children will remain in the institution was a factor that brought difficulties to performing this study. That happened because this is an interview which requires a certain care for feelings and memories experienced by the children, it was necessary an adaptation period with each interviewee until it was noted by the researcher that the rapport was established.

To that matter, it was necessary that they were sheltered for at least one month in order to take part in this study, which decreased the possible number of participants. However, this information might indicate the work performed by the staff of the institution for the quickest return of the child to their home as being effective.

The present study reports the needs for professionals of psychology in this field, for it is necessary a specialized hearing space with these subjects. In addition to that, the psychologist can help with capacitation of such professionals, for them to jointly perform a positive work for the development of the children.

It was noted the need for intervention with the workers on how they talk about their perceptions regarding the children's family members and their process of sheltering. Instrumentalization and capacitation that deal with the management of feelings and delicate situations with the children and family members are shown to be essential for decreasing the stigma lived in the shelter. It is also emphasized the importance of developing strategies to guarantee the singularity and individuality of the subjects.

Moreover, it is suggested the replication of this study in order to reach a larger number of participants and institutions. It also brought up the need for studies that focus on: the consequences of the relationship among the sheltered children; the perception of the children about the family members; and the importance of ludic activities in the child's daily basis.

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