

RECEPTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE OF INSTITUTIONALIZED CHILDREN

Linguagem receptiva e expressiva de crianças institucionalizadas

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to assess the level of language development of children who are in shelters and compare it to the children who always remained with the biological family. **Methods:** participants were 30 children aged 14 to 47 months. For language assessment was used the Test Assessment of Language Development and the hearing assessment was held on visual reinforcement audiometry with PA5 Pediatric audiometer. The verification of the hearing was made as way to investigate possible risk factors for development of the language. **Results:** statistical analysis revealed that, comparing children in the shelter with those who have always been with biological families, there was no statistically significant difference by Receptive, Expressive or Global Language. However, it may be verified that there was a higher rate of disturbances language in children who were in shelters. **Conclusion:** it was observed that children from the shelter showed no statistically significant difference when compared to children who always been with biological families

KEYWORDS: Child, Institutionalized; Child, Abandoned; Child Care; Risk Factors; Language Development; Hearing

■ INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, there are around 20 thousand¹ children who live in shelters. These are children deprived from living with their biological families, being that the causes for such deprivation may be related to the child's social or familiar².

The shelter is a kind of institutional accommodation for children and teenagers who could not stay with their biological parents, temporarily or definitively. It should be and exceptional measure, used only when all other possible efforts to keep the child/teenager in the family or community are depleted¹.

However, as much as the sheltering program is denoted as a temporary and transitory measure¹, the short or long term permanence in the institution is entirely related to the individual historic of each children and/or teenager. In fact, to many of them, the stay in a sheltering facility is not temporary, being

that many of them stay for years in these institutions without the possibility of being in foster families, or even, without being able to return to their original families³.

Living in the institutional environment enables the child to make meaningful emotional ties, even in the absence of motherly or fatherly figures, the caretakers and the children present relationships with a certain degree of affection, and unlike most people think, the perceptions of the child are not so troubled⁴.

The communication ability, is a distinctive trait of human existence, being one of the biggest contributors to the well-being of any individual. The verbal acquisition is not a fact that takes place separately in children's development, being that its emergence is part of a series of changes in the behavior of small children, marked by the appearance of symbolic correlated conducts in the way they comprehend and interact with the world⁵.

When trying to comprehend the reality of a child in a sheltering situation, it should be taken in consideration the fact that they are, necessarily, going through a deprivation period⁶. Deprivation that may have started even before their arrival at the shelter,

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since many times, the reasons to be institutionalized are related to the lack of quality in the care received when they still lived with their families.

Unfavorable environments and situations can be risk indicators to child's development, as they directly influence the experiences and opportunities the children will have⁷. The environment and the presence of the mother (biological or the person who cares for and provides nurturing to the children) are essential elements to language acquisition.

As such, the goal on this research was to check the language development of children who are in shelters and compare them to children who have always stayed with their biological families.

■ METHODS

The research Project was submitted to and approved by the Ethics in Research Committee of the origin institution, under the protocol number 175/2007 and under strict parents, Municipal Health office, school and/or institution authorization by means of signature of term of free and enlightened consent.

Casistry

30 children on ages between 14 and 47 months took part in the study. The children were divided in two groups which were named experimental group and control group.

The experimental group (EG) was composed of 15 children, being those seven boys and eight girls, all of which lived in institutions. The control group (CG), was also composed of 15 children, being those nine boys and six girls, however these children lived in their original family core.

All of the children were inhabitants of the same city in the great São Paulo. The children of the experimental group were selected in an institution that shelters children and teenagers who could not stay temporarily or definitively with their biological families and wait to be adopted for a foster family, while the children from the control group were selected in a public school.

The exclusion criteria on both groups were related to the occurrence of genetic, neurological or cognitive disorders. To be included in the EG, the participants should be living in the institution for more than 6 months, being thus past the adaptation period. To be included in the CG, the participants should not have lived at any moment of their lives in an institution such as a shelter or an orphanage.

Procedures performed

For language evaluation it was utilized the Language Development Evaluation test (Avaliação

do Desenvolvimento da Linguagem–ADL⁸ in Portuguese) which is a tool developed to evaluate the acquisition and development of content (semantics) and structure (morphology and syntax) of the language in children aged between one year to six years and eleven months.

The ADL proposes the utilization of different materials for each evaluated age range, all of the proposed material is part of the kit which composes the test. For the age range included in this study, the utilized material was the images manual containing color illustrations related to the ability in the evaluated language, concrete material (dog figures, doll, spoon, plate, cup and car, and also a bell and a tennis ball) and the protocol for ADL application, containing the stimulus-phrases. The application of the test started by the expected items or behaviors for children six months younger than the chronological age of the evaluated child, as per test orientation. To classify the language levels, it was adopted the score proposed by the test, based on the levels of the standard score. In the proposed classification are considered inside the normalcy levels scores between 115 and 85, mild disorders range from 84 and 77, moderate disorders range from 76 and 70 and severe disorders scores being equal or below 69.

The ADL management was done by one of the researchers and occurred in a session of approximately 40 minutes, in the child's environment – in the institution for the experimental group and in the school for the control group – individually and evaluated the receptive and expressive skills on the language.

The hearing verification was done as a mean of mere verification of possible risk indicators for language development. For this trial, Visual Reinforcement Audiometry using the PA5 pediatric audiometer was done, where the participants were evaluated in a room without any competing noise or visual stimulus which could become competitive. No child both from the shelter and the school presented identifiable problems by this procedure.

The data were tabulated and the analysis procedures were qualitative and quantitative, having being utilized, for statistical analysis, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test. The results were statistically analyzed, being considered the significance level of 5% (0.050).

■ RESULTS

The statistical analysis of the research data allowed to conclude that, being compared all of the children on the shelter with the ones who have always been with their biological families,

no significant differences were found regarding receptive, expressive or global language (Table 1).

When both groups are compared regarding sex (Table 2), although no statistically significant difference was found, the boys presented a higher occurrence of delays in comparison to the girls.

As to the hearing results, no children, both from the experimental group and the control group, presented problems identifiable by the procedure, showing hearing threshold equal to or lower than 20 decibel.

Table 1 – Frequency of language disorder presented by GE and GC

	GE		GC		p
	N	%	N	%	
Receptive language	4	26,66	2	13,33	0,552
Expressive language	5	33,33	2	13,33	0,671
Global language	2	13,33	2	13,33	0,350

Nonparametric Mann-Whitney test, significance level of 5% (0,050).

Table 2 – Frequency of language disorder presented by both groups as compared to sex

	Boys		Girls		p
	N	%	n	%	
Receptive language	5	31,25	1	7,14	0,261
Expressive language	5	31,25	2	14,28	0,429
Global language	4	25,00	0	0,00	0,244

Nonparametric Mann-Whitney test, significance level of 5% (0,050).

■ DISCUSSION

The institutionalization can be positive to the development of the child and/or teenager at risk situation, given that if, on the one hand there is the absence of the parents, on the other there are the caretakers and the other children both older and younger, who can influence in a positive way the cognitive, social and affective development of the child and teenager sheltered³.

There is not a consensus in literature⁹⁻¹² about the consequences of institutionalization, being it quoted as a risk or not for the development, depending many times on the historic of the child or teenager before entering the shelter, of the physical conditions of the shelter and of its commitment to the global development of the child.

In the study here presented it was not verified statistically significant difference between the groups, showing that the sheltering, for the participants, was not a risk factor for the language development. However, even if no statistically significant difference was exhibited, the results show that children who live in shelters are more prone to

present some kind of language delay, which can be associated to the above factors.

In a study¹³, when it was investigated the developmental after effects on sheltered children and children who lived with their biological families, it was observed that the first group presented neuropsychological deficits in visual memory and attention span tests. However, these children presented a similar performance in hearing processing, rules acquisition and planning tests when compared to children who have always stayed with their biological families.

Another study¹² when investigating differences between groups of children institutionalized and not-institutionalized has discovered similar results between the two groups, what is compatible with the results in the research here presented.

The difference seen on this study, in regards to sex, is also found in literature¹⁴⁻¹⁶, which affirm that girls always show superior performance on the language tests, therefore not being this a variable related to sheltering situation.

In general, the relation established with the monitors/caretakers performs a core role in the life of sheltered children and teenagers, as they will be the ones assuming the role of guiding and

protecting them, being, at that moment, their identification models. Studies^{17,18} point to the importance of graduation courses with an interdisciplinary team, recycling courses, or even a space to exchange experiences destined to these professionals, since their professional satisfaction is directly related to the quality of their work in the institution.

The insertion of speech-pathology in shelters, directed to stimulation of favorable situations to the language development, can be beneficial to the children's development. Thereby, directed actions

can prevent the emergence of communication alterations which may manifest themselves at long term periods.

■ CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that, the children living in shelters have not presented any statistically significant difference in regards to language performance, when compared to the children who have always remained with their biological families.

RESUMO

Objetivo: verificar o nível de desenvolvimento da linguagem de crianças que estão em abrigos e compará-lo ao de crianças que sempre permaneceram com a família biológica. **Métodos:** foram participantes deste estudo 30 crianças com idade entre 14 e 47 meses. Para avaliação da linguagem foi utilizado o teste Avaliação do Desenvolvimento da Linguagem e, para a triagem da audição, foi realizada a audiometria com reforço visual utilizando o audiômetro pediátrico PA5. A verificação da audição foi feita como forma de averiguação de possíveis fatores de risco para o desenvolvimento da linguagem. **Resultados:** a análise estatística permitiu constatar que, comparando as crianças do abrigo com as que sempre estiveram com a família biológica, não houve diferença estatisticamente significativa quanto a Linguagem Receptiva, Expressiva ou Global. No entanto, pode ser verificado maior índice de distúrbios de linguagem nas crianças que estavam em abrigos. **Conclusão:** observou-se que as crianças abrigadas não apresentaram diferença estatisticamente significativa quando comparadas às crianças que sempre permaneceram com suas famílias biológicas.

DESCRITORES: Criança Institucionalizada; Criança Abandonada; Cuidado da Criança; Fatores de Risco; Desenvolvimento da Linguagem; Audição

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