

ADOLESCENTS IN FOSTER CARE: FROM BREAKING UP TO FORMING BONDS¹

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ABSTRACT. The institutional shelter and family reintegration of adolescents is a complex process involving different actors and interactions. The aim of this article is to understand how the bonds between the family and the institution develop during the process of institutional care for adolescents and family reintegration, in the light of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. This is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach. Two reference technicians of the shelter unit and two mothers of fostered adolescents who had possibilities of family reintegration were the participants. The data were collected through the Ecological Engagement method in medical records, semi-structured interviews and field diary, then analyzed based on the Bioecological Model and Discourse Analysis. From the Bioecological Model, the following categories emerged: institutional foster care and the rupture of bonds; Mary's story; John's story; the foster care unit and family reintegration and the formation of new bonds. It was observed that the geographical distance between the sheltering unit and the adolescents' municipalities of origin, the large number of shelters, the insufficient number of professionals and the unavailability of transportation for trips were considered as factors that made it difficult to maintain the bonds between the adolescent and the family during the period of institutional sheltering. In the discourse of professionals from the institution, expressions were found that stigmatize poor families, especially women, revealing the urgency to promote reflections about the foster care policy and the rights of children and adolescents.

Keywords: Children and adolescent code; institutionalized adolescent; family.

ADOLESCENTES EM UNIDADE DE ACOLHIMENTO: DA RUPTURA À FORMAÇÃO DE VÍNCULOS

RESUMO. O acolhimento institucional e a reintegração familiar de adolescentes são processos complexos que envolvem diferentes atores e interações. Este artigo tem como objetivo compreender como se dão os vínculos entre a família e a instituição durante o processo de acolhimento institucional de adolescentes e a reintegração familiar, à luz da Teoria Bioecológica do Desenvolvimento Humano. É um estudo exploratório de abordagem qualitativa. Foram participantes duas técnicas de referência da unidade de acolhimento e duas mães de adolescentes acolhidos que tinham possibilidades de reintegração familiar. Os dados foram coletados por meio do método da Inserção Ecológica em prontuários, entrevistas semiestruturadas e diário de campo e analisados a partir do Modelo Bioecológico e da Análise do Discurso. A partir do Modelo Bioecológico emergiram as seguintes categorias: o acolhimento institucional e a ruptura de vínculos; a história de Maria; a história de João; a unidade de acolhimento e a reintegração familiar e a formação de

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novos vínculos. Observou-se que a distância geográfica entre a unidade de acolhimento e os municípios de origem dos adolescentes, o número elevado de acolhidos, o insuficiente quadro de profissionais e a indisponibilidade de transportes para as viagens apareceram como fatores que dificultaram a manutenção dos vínculos entre o adolescente e a família durante o período de acolhimento institucional. Verificaram-se, no discurso de profissionais da instituição, expressões que estigmatizam famílias pobres, especialmente as mulheres, revelando a urgência em promover reflexões acerca da política de acolhimento e de direitos da criança e do adolescente.

Palavras-chave: Estatuto da criança e do adolescente; adolescente institucionalizado; família.

ADOLESCENTES EN ACOGIDA: DE LA RUPTURA A LA CREACIÓN DE VÍNCULOS

RESUMEN. La acogida institucional y la reinserción familiar de los adolescentes es un proceso complejo en el que intervienen diferentes actores e interacciones. El objetivo de este artículo es comprender cómo se desarrollan los vínculos entre la familia y la institución durante el proceso de institucionalización de los adolescentes y la reintegración familiar, a la luz de la Teoría Bioecológica del Desarrollo Humano. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio con un enfoque cualitativo. Participaron dos técnicas de referencia de la unidad de acolhimento y dos madres de adolescentes acogidos que tenían posibilidades de reintegración familiar. Los datos se recopilaban mediante el método de la inserción ecológica en declaraciones, entrevistas semiestructuradas y diarios de campo, y se analizaron a partir del modelo bioecológico y del análisis del discurso. Del Modelo Bioecológico surgieron las siguientes categorías: la acogida institucional y la ruptura de los vínculos; la historia de María; la historia de João; la unidad de acogida y la reintegración familiar y la formación de nuevos vínculos. Se observó que la distancia geográfica entre la unidad de acogida y los municipios de origen de los adolescentes, el gran número de personas acogidas, la insuficiencia de profesionales y la falta de disponibilidad de transporte para los desplazamientos aparecían como factores que dificultaban el mantenimiento de los vínculos entre el adolescente y la familia durante el periodo de acogida institucional. En el discurso de los profesionales de la institución, se encontraron expresiones que estigmatizan a las familias pobres, especialmente a las mujeres, revelando la urgencia de promover reflexiones sobre la política de acogida y los derechos de los niños y adolescentes.

Palabras clave: Estatuto del niño y del adolescente; adolescente institucionalizado; familia.

Introduction

According to the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), over the past 10 years, child and adolescent care services in Brazil have been offered in accordance with the best interests of this population, with significant progress, especially in reducing the period of institutionalization (IPEA, 2021).

However, important studies address the mismatch between reality, what the laws stipulate, and what some statistical data show. They portray, therefore, a reality permeated by precarious socioeconomic conditions of families, absence and/or disarticulation of public policies, and fragility, absence, or loss of family ties (Acioli et al., 2019; Cronemberger & Teixeira, 2018; Jacobina & Paiva, 2019; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2019).

In this scenario, adolescents are among the age groups most impacted by the effects of poverty (Paiva et al., 2019). They are also the ones who suffer most severely from the consequences of various types of violence, low levels of education, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), drug abuse, and deprivation of family and community life (Macêdo et al., 2019).

The Children and Adolescent Code (ECA) (Law No. 8,069, 1990), the most important Brazilian legal instrument, which aims at the protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents, has been the target of constant criticism, because despite representing a revolutionary document that broke

paradigms of the time, the ECA still retains many limitations from the legal documents that preceded it and from the often heated and antagonistic discourses that permeated the debates that culminated in its formulation (Cifali, 2021).

Among its guidelines, the ECA reaffirms the co-responsibility between the family, society, and the State for the protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents, with the family being the center of social assistance policies, as it constitutes the first environment that welcomes, protects, and propels the individual towards development and enables access to their rights. However, when risk factors outweigh protective factors, and the family violates or allows the violation of rights, protective measures are established to protect and/or restore the rights of children and adolescents (Law No. 8,069, 1990).

These measures include, provisionally and exceptionally, institutional placement in a foster care unit, which in turn is part of the Child and Adolescent Rights Guarantee System (SGD) (Resolution No. 113, 2006). It is the responsibility of the foster care units, through a team of professionals from different areas, to develop an individual care plan for each family, whose objective is mediation with the legal authority, the inclusion of these families in social assistance programs, and the maintenance and strengthening of the bonds between the adolescents, the families, and other institutions involved in this process, aiming at the family reintegration of the adolescent, that is, when possible, promoting their return to their family of origin or extended family (Paiva et al., 2019; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2019).

Given the complexity of studies involving institutional care and family reintegration of adolescents, in which the analysis of interactions between people and their different contexts is paramount, it is considered that Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD) offers adequate theoretical support, since it has been widely used in social research involving public policy and families in situations of social vulnerability (Bronfenbrenner, 2012; Eriksson et al., 2018).

Among its main assumptions, this theory features the PPCT Bioecological Model, which understands human development as a result of the reciprocal interaction between four interrelated cores: Process, Person, Context, and Time (Bronfenbrenner, 2012; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2019).

Thus, the Process component comprises the particular forms of interaction between organism and environment that become progressively more complex over time. These interactions occur through proximal or more distal processes. The Person component involves the individual and their biopsychosocial characteristics. The Context comprises the environments where interactions and developments take place. It is formed by four levels of interconnected ecological environments: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Finally, Time, which allows for the analysis of the influence of time on human development throughout the life cycle (Bronfenbrenner, 2012).

Therefore, this study aimed to understand how the bonds between family and institution occur during the institutional care process for adolescents and family reintegration, in light of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development.

Method

This was a qualitative, exploratory study conducted in a state-run public foster care unit located in the northern part of the municipality of Recife, state of Pernambuco, with the capacity to house 20 children and adolescents aged 0 to 18 years, of both sexes. The research was based on the Bioecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD) as its theoretical and methodological framework.

The article consists of cases of adolescents analyzed in the dissertation research entitled "*The family reintegration process and the family-institution bond: a bioecological approach*" (O processo de reintegração familiar e o vínculo família-instituição: uma abordagem bioecológica, in Portuguese). For this article, two cases of adolescents were chosen, who, according to the reference technicians of the foster care unit, were in the process of family reintegration and with whom interactions were possible between the researchers and at least one of the adolescents' family members. The adolescents in the cases analyzed were 15 and 11 years old and will be identified as Maria and João, respectively. Two professionals from the institution's technical team, both trained in psychology and with over a year of experience, who were directly responsible for the cases, were interviewed. Both were female, aged 50 and 60, and will be identified as P1 and P2.

For the execution of the research, the Ecological Engagement method was adopted, which consists of, based on the assumptions of the guiding theory of the study, becoming part of, observing and examining

the environment as it is perceived and felt by people, to build a connection between the subject and the object, observer and observed through the roles and habits of daily life (Prati et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2019).

The ecological engagement in the institution took place between January and July 2019, with, on average, two weekly visits, in the morning and afternoon shifts, lasting at least four hours each. During the visits, it was possible to gradually immerse oneself in the institution's routine, and data were collected through consultations of information records, semi-structured interviews, and a field diary.

The field diary was used throughout the research period, focusing on the people, actions, relationships, and contexts in which the researchers, professionals, adolescents, and their families were involved, aiming for a faithful record of the scenarios, discourses, stories, and social constructions, both of those observed and the observers (Silva et al., 2019).

The semi-structured interviews were scheduled in advance, administered individually by two researchers, and carried out after obtaining informed consent. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, with an average duration of 40 minutes each. The two reference technicians, each responsible for one case, and the mothers of the adolescents, Maria and João, were interviewed.

The semi-structured interview is an instrument used in qualitative research and characterized by combining "[...] a script with pre-formulated questions and other open-ended questions, [which allows] a free and spontaneous reflection by the interviewee on the topics indicated" (Minayo & Costa, 2018, p. 142).

The data analysis was conducted in light of the BTHD and its PPCT Bioecological Model, aiming at the systemic analysis of the contexts in which the phenomena occur, of human interactions as processes that occur at a given time, operated by people with their biopsychosocial characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 2012).

With the Discourse Analysis (DA) technique, the objective was to reach, in the collected data, whether textual or observational, the messages that go beyond their linguistic information or descriptions of the observed phenomena. From this perspective, it is assumed that the meaning of the discourse, whether spoken or expressed in gestures and attitudes, carries within it the ideological positions produced through socio-historical interactions. Thus, the place of speech gains prominence in Discourse Analysis, where a discourse without a subject is inconceivable, just as a subject without ideology is inconceivable (Orlandi, 2005).

This study complied with the requirements of Resolution No. 466, of December 12, 2012, of the National Health Council, regarding research involving human beings, approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under Opinion Number 2265027.

Results e discussion

From the data analysis, categories emerged that correspond to the components of the PPCT Bioecological Model, as illustrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Categories generated from the PPCT Model

PPCT Model	Category	Description
Person and Time	Institutional Foster Care and the Rupture of Bonds <i>Maria's story</i> <i>João's story</i>	Presentation of cases of adolescents in foster care and in the process of family reintegration, the family history before and during the period of institutional care, considering the biopsychosocial characteristics of the people involved.
Context	The foster care unit as a microsystem	This refers to the physical characteristics and the role played by the care unit, the environment in which the phenomena under study occur.

Process	Family reintegration and the formation of new bonds	Analysis of the processes established between the different actors involved in the reintegration of the adolescent into family life, with emphasis on the bonds established between the foster care unit and the adolescent's family.
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Person and Time: Institutional Foster Care and the Rupture of Bonds

Maria's story

Maria is a 15-year-old teenager, the daughter of divorced parents, who lived with her mother, stepfather, and maternal grandmother. Her maternal grandmother was an elderly woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease and therefore required constant care from Maria's mother and stepfather. The family also included an older sister who was married and had a baby daughter, but lived in another residence, and the teenager's biological father lived in another state, where he started another family.

The family resided in the Southern Zona da Mata of Pernambuco, 96 km from the foster care unit. The mother was a public employee and supplemented the family income by selling cosmetics, while the stepfather was unemployed.

Since the age of 12, the teenager had a history of disobedience and impulsivity, and reported using illicit drugs. Before institutional care, according to her mother, Maria and three other classmates assaulted another teenager in a public square. The assault resulted in a socio-educational measure, initially in a closed regime, later in an open regime, when she began providing services to the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS) in her municipality of origin. Given her refusal to comply with the socio-educational measure and her contempt of the judge at the hearing, institutional care was determined in a foster care unit outside her municipality.

Maria arrived at the institution, accompanied by a child welfare counselor from her municipality, in November 2018. According to her information records, the reasons for her placement were family neglect, drug use, and petty crimes. During her time at the institution, she was enrolled in the sixth grade of elementary school at a public school and, outside of school hours, completed a vocational course to become a cashier. At the time of the research, she was taking a basic computer course and had a history of numerous instances of truancy during her time in school. Maria acted as a leader among the other adolescents in the shelter and attempted to dominate interactions with the staff and researchers. The removal of the adolescent from her family environment had a significant impact on Maria's routine, as she was accustomed to the material benefits provided by her mother and the lack of rules and boundaries in her family and community environment.

Maria's mother always demonstrated a desire for her daughter's return home, and this desire seemed to be the strongest driver of positive behaviors during the reintegration process, demonstrated through care, affection, and monitoring of the teenager's routine despite the geographical distance between them. However, her passive behavior in the face of her daughter's actions seemed to contribute to the development of a conflictual relationship between the teenager and the family, and consequently, in her interactions with other people in other microsystems. Thus, it is possible that, feeling vulnerable, this mother placed her hopes in the institution to do what she could not within the family, employing the function of punishment in foster care, like a 'reformatory' to modify her daughter's behavior.

The institution's technical team pointed out the need for psychological support for the mother, aiming to help her understand her feelings in her role as a mother. However, on July 5, 2019, eight months after arriving at the institution, Maria was reintegrated into her family without the necessary support for her mother actually taking place.

João's story

João is an 11-year-old teenager, and his nuclear family consists of 16 people, including the teenager, his mother, his stepfather, and 13 siblings. From his mother's first relationship, 10 children were born, with João being the second-to-last. From her second relationship, four more children were born, one girl and three boys, aged between 10 years and 8 months.

When João was one year old, his father was murdered, leaving behind nine children and his wife pregnant with their tenth. At the time of the research, his mother, stepfather, four teenagers, and four children lived in the same residence. Of the four teenagers, two were serving socio-educational measures, and João was under protective custody in a foster care unit located 77 km from his municipality of residence.

On August 28, 2018, the teenager arrived at the foster care unit, and according to his file, the reasons that led to the protective custody measure were: family neglect, alcohol and other drug use, drug dealing, and living on the streets. Despite the causes that led to João's institutionalization, his family was seen by the professionals at the foster care unit as a family with strong emotional ties and who demonstrated a desire for the teenager's return to family life.

The family income consisted of João's father's survivor's pension and the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) benefit, a federal government income distribution program in effect at the time of the research, intended for families formed with the new partner, in addition to the mother's work as a market vendor and the stepfather's small fan repair services.

The research team had the opportunity to accompany a visit to the family in March 2019, when it was possible to interview the mother and learn a little about the adolescent's relationship with his family.

In an interview, the mother revealed a life marked by deprivation and family abandonment since childhood, without access to education and living on the streets. The removal of the teenager from family life, therefore, was a source of great anguish for the mother, who, at the time of the research, had been diagnosed with depression, was breastfeeding, and dedicated herself to caring for her children practically alone, without the support of other adult children, about whom little was mentioned. The mother reported great difficulties in visiting her son in the shelter due to a lack of family and institutional material resources. The family's first visit to João took place a month after he arrived at the shelter, and the institutional visit to the family occurred two months later.

During his time in the institution, João was enrolled in the third grade of elementary school at a public school and was awaiting inclusion in after-school activities. João had difficulty reading and writing, and before arriving at the shelter, he did not attend school regularly.

The teenager had several episodes of escaping from the shelter, according to his own accounts and the accounts of the institution's professionals; his goal was to go for walks, go to the beach, and use drugs, such as marijuana and cigarettes.

On the research team's last visit to the foster care unit in July 2019, after yet another escape, João and five other teenagers from the shelter were at the Child and Adolescent Protection Police Station (DPCA) and, without further information for the research team, were awaiting their return to the foster care unit. Thus, 11 months after being placed in foster care, João still had no prospect of being reintegrated into family life.

The context: the foster care unit as a microsystem

Context is the setting in which human development takes place and involves a set of circumstances, people, their interactions, and their roles. Thus, the foster care unit, defined as a temporary place of residence for children and adolescents at risk and in vulnerable situations, becomes, during the period of separation from family life, the adolescent's primary ecological environment. It should be a space of inclusion and development for those who remain there, since it is within this environment that daily interactions occur, which will become increasingly complex over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2012).

The foster care unit met almost all the minimum requirements regarding location and adequate physical structure for its operation (Brasil, 2009). It was located in a residential area and had two floors with bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a study room, bathrooms, a kitchen, a service area, a balcony, and a backyard. An attached structure housed the administrative sector, with a meeting room (containing

two computers), the coordination room (where the archive was located), a bathroom, and a small kitchen. However, the absence of a room for the technical team, recommended by the normative document (Brasil, 2009), was observed, hindering the full development of the activities of these professionals who had to share the room with the coordination.

The institution's professional team consisted of a coordinator, two psychologists, a pedagogue, an administrative assistant, two to three social educators per shift, a doorman and a security guard. They relied on professionals from outsourced companies for cleaning, laundry, and kitchen services.

Throughout the research period, the foster care unit operated well above its capacity, sheltering almost double the recommended capacity. During the period of insertion into the shelter, an insufficient professional team was observed, including the technical team, with the absence of the social assistance professional recommended by NOB-RH/SUAS (Ferreira, 2011). According to P1's account:

[...] if we had more visits, it would be much better, because in this case we have 36 boys, we have four visits per week per technician, so that's eight; you visit one boy, you visit another the following week, and by the time you go back to visit yours, three months have already passed.

The institution, therefore, was run by a team overburdened with work, with accumulated activities and high staff turnover.

In addition to signaling the precariousness of the employment relationship and professional dissatisfaction, the high turnover of professionals generates insecurity among those fostered, as it hinders the building of bonds with the caregiver, as well as reproducing the abandonment and the experience of broken bonds experienced by many of these adolescents in their family context (Furlan & Lima, 2021).

Despite these difficulties, the institution maintained a well-defined routine, with set times for waking up, eating meals, and participating in educational, sports, and leisure activities. In the annex where the administrative sector operated, a board with the monthly agenda was affixed to the wall, recording appointments with the health network, leisure programs, court hearings, and technical visits to families and the protection network in their municipalities. However, the lack of transportation and fuel made it difficult to carry out these activities, especially the technical visits and visits by the adolescents to their families, since the institution housed children and adolescents from all over the state. For P1, this lack of transportation was a major obstacle to the shelter's routine, especially because it made visits difficult, weakened the bonds between them, prevented family members from participating in the adolescent's development, and hindered activities that could be carried out among them, making the reintegration process more difficult: "[...] Because the family can participate in their birthday, can participate in some meeting, can participate somewhere, but how? If there's no way to get there, if it's far away? Do you understand? How can we organize family groups here?" (P1).

One of the principles of foster care is the preservation and strengthening of family and community ties through the promotion of visits, group discussions, encouraging phone calls, visits, and outings for the adolescent with their family; allowing family participation in birthdays, commemorative dates, school meetings, and consultations, among others (Law No. 13,509, 2017). Given the geographical distance and lack of resources of institutions and families, activities to strengthen ties would be limited to weekly phone calls and occasional visits.

The Process: Family reintegration and the formation of new bonds

The family reintegration of a fostered adolescent should be understood as a complex event, consisting of numerous processes/interactions at different stages, which can either promote or inhibit its success. For its effectiveness, the adolescent's return to family life must follow a flow incorporated into the child and adolescent protection system, with a rights-based approach, without causing harm and involving a large number of stakeholders.

To that end, cases must be evaluated individually at most every three months by the legal authority, based on a report prepared by a multidisciplinary team from the protection network, including the foster care unit, and the adolescent's stay in the shelter should not exceed eighteen months, except in cases of proven need that serve the adolescent's best interests (Law No. 13,509, 2017).

The mechanisms necessary for the reintegration process include the initial approach to the adolescent and their family by the team of professionals, the preparation of reports and the Individual Care

Plan (PIA), more frequent and impartial institutional and home visits, and the involvement of parents and/or guardians in the institution's care routine (Paiva et al., 2019; Monteiro et al., 2020).

In the initial approach to the adolescent, the professionals involved are expected to be attentive to the social stigma, fueled by pejorative and depreciative values, not infrequently attributed to the institutionalized adolescent. Prejudiced treatment can originate from professionals within the institution, as well as from the school microsystem that will absorb this adolescent, or even from members of their own families (Siqueira & Dell'Aglío, 2019).

Thus, when analyzing the professionals' interviews, the culturally established and reproduced social patterns regarding what is expected of the family stood out, in addition to parental roles and gender issues. The way these issues are handled can favor the development of competencies or dysfunctions in the processes involved in family reintegration, enabling or inhibiting it. When presenting Maria's case, the professional from the foster care unit refers to the adolescent as "[...] a girl from a family, in the sense that... she has a well-structured mother, grandmother, the whole family" (P1).

When the reference technician characterizes the adolescent as a family girl, she informs us that there is inevitably a shelter girl. Considering that Maria has a mother who is a civil servant, a grandmother, a home, good food, good hygiene products, good clothes, long blonde hair, and white skin, the shelter girl would be the one who did not fit this description.

By standardizing an ideal of a structured family, the status of a dysfunctional family is granted to the poor Brazilian family, seen as incapable of providing the necessary care for their children (Cardoso et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2017).

It is still common for children from impoverished families to be institutionalized, justified by family neglect, but in many cases, serving the logic of social exclusion, which segregates the misfits, labeling as family neglect what is the result of poverty, which affects families generation after generation (Furlan & Lima, 2021).

Referring to João's family, his mother did not have access to basic rights such as education, health, food, and housing during her childhood and much of her adult life. As a consequence of her vulnerable condition, she lacks the conditions to understand her son's institutionalization and to take the necessary initiatives for his reintegration into the protection network.

Although considered *structured*, according to professionals at the shelter, Maria's family's difficulties revolved around the mother's difficulties in dealing with the teenager's challenging behavior. The figure of the father has historically been linked to the figure of the man who owns property, his wife, and his children, characterized as the dictator of law and honor. Always supported by a patriarchal culture, he was above everyone and performed a disciplinary function through repressive and oppressive codes. The father, in the historical context, was the one who gave the child his name and embodied authority, consequently being the representative of the law (Bernardi, 2017).

In both cases in this article, families are represented by mothers, and few references are made to partners, corroborating the IBGE, which demonstrated changes in family structure, with an increase in the number of female heads of household from 22.2% to 37.3% (IBGE, 2010; Mozzaquatro & Arpini, 2017).

With the changing family dynamics of the Brazilian population, discussing the roles of parents and other caregivers, as well as gender issues and the strong presence of patriarchy in various social contexts over time, contributes to the deconstruction of stereotypes that reinforce prejudices, inequalities, and oppressions (Campos & Tilio, 2018), which naturalize the superiority and domination of one over the other and reinforce and determine in the social group who can and cannot set limits, as P1 refers to Maria's case:

[...] 'No' represents the law; the law is the paternal figure. The absence of the paternal figure at home is the representation of 'no', and this 'no' needs to be very present in the family because the child needs to know that they can only go this far, right?

It is important to highlight that men/fathers, even when absent, whether by choice or by fate, are considered the legitimate guardians of order and law in the family, from the sexist perspective that still prevails in society. To the woman, therefore, remains the role of the weaker sex, although she is attributed all the responsibility for the family.

Similarly, regarding motherhood and family planning, the demands regarding pregnancy, raising, and developing children are directed at women, as if they were exclusively female projects. This is what

P2 reported in one of the visits to the protection network about a possible tubal ligation for João's mother, who had already given birth to 14 children, was breastfeeding, and was of reproductive age: "[...] One of the things I asked at the health unit [the professional replied:] 'No, we scheduled it, but she didn't come'. So [...] they don't have that concern. Okay, she scheduled it, but she didn't come. The person has eight children!"

Family planning is the right to information, specialized assistance, and resources that allow individuals to freely, consciously, and safely choose whether or not to have children, as well as to select the most appropriate contraceptive method for all genders. Therefore, it is the responsibility of professionals in the field to provide health education, counseling, and clarification to users, considering that people and their life conditions are unique and must be understood (Dias et al., 2021; Franze et al., 2019; Mozzaquatro & Arpini, 2017).

Therefore, what is still observed in the discourses that permeate the policy of protecting children and adolescents is the blaming of families, which in turn are those that do not act in accordance with what the protection norms advocate, conceived in their essence for the bourgeois monogamous nuclear family (Belfort et al., 2015; Furlan & Lima, 2021).

The scenario described, therefore, hinders the family reintegration process for the adolescent insofar as it reduces the reasons that led to their placement in foster care to family neglect, obscuring the real causes of the violation of rights and the removal of the adolescent from family life, such as poverty and unprotectedness, which lead many families to a situation of social vulnerability (Paiva et al., 2019).

Final considerations

The analysis of the links between the family and the institution during the institutional care process for adolescents and family reintegration proved to be a highly relevant study. Through the Ecological Engagement method and the PPCT Model, the normative documents on the policy for the protection of children and adolescents, the contexts, the people, the time, and the processes involved during the application of this protection measure were addressed.

The analysis of the bonds between the family and the institution during the institutional care process for adolescents reveals cultural, economic, and structural aspects that interfere with family reintegration.

Overcrowding in the foster care unit, the lack of a social worker, and the insufficient number and high turnover of professionals are major challenges for the development of institutional activities, in addition to significantly impacting the construction of meaningful bonds between families and the care institution.

Added to this scenario, the lack of institutional and family material resources hindered the family reintegration process for the two adolescents in this study, as it made it impossible for both the professionals and the adolescents and their families to travel for visits and to promote activities aimed at forming and maintaining bonds between the adolescents, their families, the foster care unit, and other institutions in the adolescents' municipality of origin. The statements made by the reference technicians revealed the professionals' great commitment to family reintegration, while at the same time being marked by concepts that contribute to the stigmatization of poor families, especially women, within the family and social context.

In conclusion, the process between foster care and family reintegration of adolescents is fraught with obstacles, and its effectiveness requires efficient coordination among all actors involved. The findings revealed the need to promote an agenda of discussions on the concepts that permeate the policy of children's and adolescents' rights, such as families and their various arrangements; gender issues; neglect and its nuances; poverty and social vulnerability, in order to build a more effective care network in the defense and promotion of rights for adolescents and their families.

This research was limited by the difficulty in establishing lasting, close relationships with families, caused by the geographical distance between the families and the shelter unit and by the institution's lack of resources. In fact, this is a difficulty inherent in the institution, which, in a cascading effect, impacted the research. Therefore, future studies should be conducted in foster care institutions with adolescents housed in units within the same municipality where their families reside, in order to ascertain, through closer contact with the family and the support network, how bonds are formed and their implications for the family reintegration process without the geographical distance factor.

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