

The Trauma Suffered by Left behind Children and Its Impact on Their Emotional Development: A Pilot Study with Brazilian Immigrants in the United States

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Abstract : Immigrating to a different country may imply having to handle many difficult exertions. There is a particular issue that has to be endured by some immigrants: the children they had to leave behind. It is a phenomenon that occurs with certain frequency. Surprisingly, despite the fact that immigration in the United States is such a large proceeding, there is not much research about the topic in America exploring the trauma of the abandonment caused by this separation and its consequences on the mental health of those children. The term "left behind children" is usually applied to children who were left behind by their parents in their original nation under the care of a noteworthy relative, frequently the grandparents, when they moved to another country. This preliminary research, which is a partial study projected for a doctoral thesis, investigated whether the trauma of abandonment experienced by ten left behind children had affected their emotional development. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a brief interview were utilized to assess the information. The SDQ explored scales such as emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial behavior. In this pilot study, the results indicated that all these issues had some sort of significant correlation between them. During the interviews, the participants or their parents identified a range of symptoms: anxiety disorder, eating disorders, panic attacks, psychotic-like experiences, drug use and depression. Hence, it seems that there is a connection between the trauma of abandonment suffered due to the separation and the children's consequent symptomatic behavior. Further studies are indeed necessary to validate the initial results of this investigation.

Keywords : abandonment, parent migration, psychological problems, trauma

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