

The Psychologist's Role in a Social Assistance Reference Center: A Case of Violence and Child Sexual Abuse in Northeastern Brazil

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Abstract : In Brazilian public policy, the Centres of Reference for Social Assistance (CRAS in Portuguese) are part of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS in Portuguese). SUAS is responsible for addressing spontaneous or currently active cases that are brought forth from other services in the social assistance network. The following case was reviewed by CRAS's team in Recife, Brazil, after a complaint of child abuse was filed against the mother of a 7-year-old girl by the girl's aunt. The girl is the daughter of an incestuous relationship between her mother and her older brother. The complaint was registered by service staff and five interventions were subsequently carried out on behalf of the child. These interventions provided a secure place for dialogue with both the child and her family and allowed for an investigation of the abuse to proceed. They took place in the child's school as well as her aunt's residence. At school, the child (with her classmates) watched a video and listened to a song about the prevention of child abuse. This was followed up with a second intervention to determine any signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), by having the child play with the mobile app 'My Angela'. Books on the themes of family and fear were also read to the child on different occasions at her school - after every intervention she was asked to draw something related to fear and her concept of a family. After the interventions and discussing the case as a team, we reached several conclusions: 1) The child did not appear to show any symptoms of PTSD; 2) She normally fantasized about her future and life story; 3) She did not allow herself to be touched by strangers with whom she lacks a close relationship (such as classmates or her teacher); 4) Through her drawings, she reproduced the conversations she had had with the staff; 5) She habitually covered her drawings when asked questions about the abuse. In this particular clinical case, we want to highlight that the role of the Psychologist's intervention at CRAS is to attempt to resolve the issue promptly (and not to develop a prolonged clinical study based on traditional methods), by making use of the available tools from the social assistance network, and by making referrals to the relevant authorities, such as the Public Ministry, so that final protective actions can be taken and enforced. In this case, the Guardian Council of the Brazilian Public Ministry was asked to transfer the custody of the child to her uncle. The mother of the child was sent to a CAPS (Centre for Psychosocial Care), having been diagnosed with psychopathology. The child would then participate in NGO programs that allow for a gradual reduction of social exposure to her mother before being transferred to her uncle's custody in Sao Paulo.

Keywords : child abuse, intervention, social psychology, violence

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