

Interactions between Siblings in Institutional Sheltering: A Case Study

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to analyze the interaction between siblings and their peers in institutional sheltering, debating the contextual conditions of the institution. A group of siblings took part in the research, in total there were four children housed in a big institution the city of Belém, Pará. The data was collected through the record sheets and the observation of the children's interaction, making use of the socio-focal observation technique. The interactive episodes among the children were categorized into interactions that involved sharing, conflict, cooperation, competition, behavior similarity, affection and search for closeness. The results showed that the siblings spent more time and increased frequency of interacting with themselves, among the most common categories were the search for closeness, affection and cooperation. The data raise the debate about sheltering institutions, especially in regards to establishing the relationship between siblings in this kind of institution and the strategies used by them to keep their bonds.

Keywords: sheltering institution, siblings, interactions

Several authors have been focused on studying the children in institutional sheltering concerning either the profile of the institution and the welcomed (Berger & Gracino, 2005; Cavalcante, 2008; Serrano, 2008; Silva, 2004), or those that deal with the implications to the child development (Alexandre & Vieira, 2004; Maia & Williams, 2005; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2006). Nevertheless, studies about the interactions among groups of siblings in institutional sheltering are still deficient.

The history of institutional sheltering of children and adolescents in Brazil has been marked by changes since the first institutions that carried out charitable-religious based measures until it became the responsibility of the State, through the Child and Adolescent Statute- CAS (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA)*), sanctioned on July 13th, 1990 by the law 8.069, which states that children and adolescents have their basic rights granted, thus changing the focus of sheltering institutions to be only of assistance, therefore becoming a place for socialization and development (Lopes; Silva & Malfitano, 2006; Rizinni & Rizinni, 2004; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2006). Consequently, the CAS proposes the sheltering restructuring in a way for it to have a residential character, offering personal attendance in small units and for reduced groups, preserving family bonds and getting involved with the surround community.

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The recommendations predicted by CAS were improved at Law n.12.010/09, which emphasizes the preservation of family bonds and higher responsibilities for the sheltering institution, establishing in two years the longest time for sheltering, and evaluations twice a year that present proposals of planning for the cases of familiar reintegration, among other measures.

Bronfenbrenner (1979/1996) states in his studies that children institutions may serve as a broad context for the development of sheltered children and adolescents, however, emphasizes that despite a possible place for development, the institution doesn't provide an equivalent of a functional family. Thus, the shelter may work as development context and protection factor as risk factor for the child development.

Several researchers (Maia and Williams, 2005; Oliveira, 2006; Ribeiro and Ciampone, 2002) have come to an agreement that the shelter may be a risk factor for several reasons, among them are: if it keeps the child from living in a family and community environment, making it difficult for the siblings to bond; if it lacks individual attention and affective relationship; if there is no exchange between the school and the community, among other things, constituting therefore a place for protection if the opposite is true (Abaid; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, no prelo; Siqueira & Dell'Aglio, 2006).

Aside the fact that several researches (Bowlby, 1969/2002; Maia & Williams, 2005; Yunes, Miranda & Cuello, 2004) have emphasized the negative aspects of institutional living, Abaid et al.

(2011) consider that there is a change in the understanding of the institutional context and associate this change to more qualitative methods of investigation, **starting** from the point of view of sheltered children, to base theories that highlight the importance the context have for the development. Most previous studies point to **impairments** in the development due to institutional living, while modern studies such as Arpini (2003) and Siqueira (2006) point to a positive perspective about this kind of living. Siqueira and Dell'Aglio (2006) declare that the deficits found in the development of these children are not necessarily due to the institutionalization itself, on the other hand, are due to the risks these children were exposed in their families before entering the shelter.

It is believed that identifying the risk factors should be accomplished along with the protection factors that can enable those processes that facilitate the child development. Maia and Williams (2005) describe as a protection factor the affective bond with an alternative caretaker, as siblings and grandparents, considering that "such person can become an important support for the stress moments, developing, therefore, the child's competence, autonomy, and trust" (p. 98). In this sense, the fraternal role as a protection factor for the child development in sheltering situation come to perspective.

Several studies (Cavalcante, 2008; Rizzini & Rizzini, 2004; Serrano, 2008; Silva, 2004) have pointed out that the number of siblings living in shelters is substantial in relation to the total number of sheltered children. In a reserach taken in Belém, Cavalcante (2008) identified 46.69% of siblings living in the same shelter, in addition, it was also found that they were living with two siblings (15.68%), or even three (4.84%). Thus, due to the substantial number of children with siblings in institutional shelter, it is believed that the relationship between them is extremely important to understand the family dynamic and how the siblings work as a protection factor when facing the sheltering situation.

In a study made in Spain on the relationship of siblings in institutional sheltering Palacios, Sánchez-Sandoval and León (2004) state that siblings sheltered in institutions as those develop strong feelings of complicity, understanding and protection. In addition the authors state that among groups of institutionalized siblings there are patters of relationship, in which the oldest may have the role of parents for their younger siblings, this aspect should be taken into consideration for families that decide to adopt siblings.

Alexandre and Vieira (2004) when studying the attachment among institutionalized children who live in shelters, found out that older siblings have a strong meaning for the social, affective, and cognitive development of younger children.

In addition, Carreño and Avilla (2002) state that the interactions between linked peers, mostly siblings and friends, are known to be more intense and affective, and to last longer than those involving occasional peers for instance. In this sense, siblings are important agents of socialization and insertion in the culture, so this bond should be maintained even and specially in sheltering conditions.

Cavalcante (2008) identified significant bond creation between the child and the educator or other child, emphasizing siblings groups. The results point out that the focal subjects were targeting educators and other children from different dormitory to take care of. Such category highlights the presence of siblings that tried, stimulated and demonstrated different ways of taking care of the sibling, thus, 26.77% of all the behaviors that express affection of the focal subject for another child happens in interaction of dyads or triads of siblings, in which the more expressive percentage are associated to behaviors as establishing affective contact, helping and playing of "make believe caretaking". The results point to the demonstration of care and attachment between close children, friends and/or peers of siblings, especially in institutional environment.

The results found by Cavalcante (2008), similarly to what was discussed by Alexandre and Vieira (2004), and Carreño and Avilla (2002), point out that children are more willing to help closer peers, including their siblings; interacted affectionately with known peers, mainly family; and paid more attention to the younger ones when they were older siblings. Those results suggest that the behavior of caretaking among siblings may contribute to preserve the family bonds during their time in the shelter.

In his research, Almeida (2009) investigated the social network of children in institutional shelter, trying to identify under the perspective of the child how the siblings and other people are seen in the network. The main results show that the children's network is built essentially by people from the shelter and the family, the siblings were the family members most mentioned, chiefly when considering several functions as protection, emotional support, affective relationship, playing and leisure.

Through the analysis of several studies (Alexandre & Vieira, 2004; Almeida, 2009; Cavalcante, 2008) on the interaction of siblings in shelters it was acknowledged that siblings are important sources of support in the sheltering condition, the sibling is the person to whom the child more frequently looked for in situations that involve care, protection, emotional support, affective relationship, in addition to plays and leisure. It is considered that physical proximity between siblings is a major factor for the maintenance of the bond, for this proximity enables or ease sharing experiences and feelings during the time in the shelter.

In this sense, considering that little are the studies that deal with the interaction among children in institutional environment, and even less studies consider the group of siblings experience in living in an institution, this study aims at describing and analyzing the interactions between siblings and their peers in institutional sheltering, debating about the contextual conditions of the institution.

Method

Participants

This study was carried out with the largest group of siblings housed in the same institution, composed by 4 children, a pair of four-year-old twin, a five-year-old boy, and a seven-year-old one. Were also part of this study members of the shelter staff including educators, two psychologists, two social assistants, and the manager, which informally revealed information about the siblings, helping with the case description.

Characterization of the Institution

The research was accomplished in the largest state shelter for children with ages from zero to six years old of both genders.

The shelter started its activity in 1994, in the building where used to be a day care center, therefore the building doesn't have residential characteristics, with several rooms organized to attend to specific age demands. The children are split into dormitories, with an average of 10 beds by room, obeying the age criteria, thus grouped: Dormitory I (zero to five months), Dormitory II (six to eleven months), Dormitory III (twelve to twenty-three months), Dormitory IV (three years), Dormitory V (four years), Dormitory VI (five years), and Dormitory VII (six years).

It is important to state that about the care routine, educational activities, feeding, showering and leisure are carried out according to the dorms, and clothes and toys used by the children are not of personal use.

Instruments and Materials

Two instruments were used during the data collection.

- 1) Children Characterization Form - Created by Cavalcante (2008) based on Weber and Kassobudski (1996). The instrument deals with psychosocial condition of children that live in shelters and similar institutions. The form contains open-ended and closed-ended questions about the following subjects: personal identification, family structure, institutionalization history, current socio-judicial situation and the child's health. The forms were completed using information from materials and documents (reports, certification) made available by the institution and/or acquired by direct conversation with the technical staff of the shelter, enabling the collection of data from each child of the research. The following documents were used to collect the data: a) institutional report; b) Born-alive statement, c) Birth Certificate; d) Referral Term; e) Social Statute.
- 2) Register sheet for the video recordings - Made by the researcher. It was created to help in the transcription of the focal-subjects observation sessions. The sheet is two-fold: a) contains information about the child (focal-subject), the children from the dormitory, observation locus and which situation the interactive episode took place; b) contains a board with two columns, one with time separation for every 30 seconds and the corresponding line for the transcription.
- 3) Visual and audiovisual material - the study made use of visual material (for the record of photographs) and audiovisual (video footage), for the record of interactions among the siblings in the institution.

Procedure

The first things to do was to get a court authorization to perform the research, which was later subjected to the Ethics Committee of Researches with Human Beings (ECRHB) from the Tropical Medicine Center at the Federal University of Pará, receiving an approved feedback under the number nº 039/09.

The research was performed in five stages: 1) First contact; 2) Data collection for the characterization of the children through the documents provided by the institution and conversation with the support team without the use of structured interview; 3) Habituation period, characterized by daily visits that lasted about 120 minutes for two months to acknowledge the institution's routine and making the presence of the researcher more familiar to the staff and the children; 4) Observational data collection, through video recordings of the interactions of the children and their siblings and the other children. Each child was observed for 10 minutes in six different sessions, adding up to 60 minutes of observation per child, making use of the focal-subject technique (Altman, 1970). The footage were made in different days and different shifts, in places of the institution that favored moments of gathering of the siblings. After the footage the transcription of interactive episodes was carried out, identifying each child: 1) frequency of interaction per partner and in the total of partners; 2) interaction time; and 3) the number of children with whom they interacted.

The episodes were ranked according to Lopes (2007), with changes, and according to Cavalcante (2008), crossing the data between siblings x non siblings, coetaneous and non coetaneous: 1) *Affection*: interactions that express behaviors as caressing the other.

The most common types were: hugging, kissing and cherishing; 2) *Conflict*: interactions that express behaviors as kicking, hitting or pushing the other in situations that deals with disputing people, places, or objects; 3) *Sharing*: interactions that express behaviors as sharing toys, food, school supplies or other objects; 4) *Cooperation*: interactions that express behaviors as helping the other when in need, through emotional, cognitive and social support; 5) *Competition*: interactions that express the behavior as comparing to see who has the best shoe, toy or school supply, or disputing through games; 6) *Similarities of behaviors*: interactions that express behaviors as imitating the other in games, conversations, and postures; 7) *Searching for closeness*: it states about the ways used by the child to keep itself close to the peer. It involves behaviors as walking, running, jumping, pedaling, hopping, lying down or sitting near, pointing out, calling, or directing the arms to, following or walking by its side. The data of the contents of interactions were presented through graphics which compare the content of interactions among siblings and non siblings, from the same dormitory and different dormitories.

Results and Discussion

Group Description

The group is composed by four siblings (three boys and one girl, a seven-year old boy, a five-year old boy, and a pair of four-year-old twins), originally from a nuclear family composed by father, mother and five more siblings that are in different institutions. Regarding the socio-family situation, the group has the parents as legal responsible: the mother is 30 years old and has no job, the father is 35 years old and is an informal salesman. In the forms the information concerning the income and scholarship of the parents is missing. Before the sheltering the children lived with their biological family in the family house, which had two rooms, mixed built of woods and bricks, with sanitary utilities, tap water, and electricity. The reasons presented for the abandonment were negligence, poverty, physical violence, and drug abusers parents. The children were sent at different age to the shelter, the twins were six months old, one of the boys was 17 months and the other was 41 months. They stayed in the shelter for four months. After this period of time they went back to living with their family, and were sent again to the shelter in may 2008 for the same reasons, therefore being destituted from their parents, during the research they were waiting for adoption.

With regards to the institutional sheltering all the children were institutionalized for two years and ten months; the time they spent with their family which was of a year and two months for the twins (called I1 and I2), two years and four months (for I3 boy) and four years and two months for the other boy (I4). During the period they were sheltered the children received visits from their parents every three months and occasionally some visits were scheduled with the siblings in other institutions, separated by gender and age. These meetings usually took place outside the institutions.

Taking into consideration that the institutional sheltering is, sometimes, associated to poverty, abandonment and negligence (Cavalcante, 2008; Serrano, 2008; Silva, 2004), in other words, factors related to the family conditions, the children when sheltered carry a sort of experiences that make the siblings have an special role in their lives, for the absence of the social and cultural apparatus leads the children to spend most of their free time accompanying their parents and siblings, replacing great part of the affective and emotional exchanges with the parents (Almeida, Maehara, Rossetti-Ferreira, 2011).

An interesting fact is that the children have siblings outside the shelter, which are in other institutions for not being in the age range of the institution, pointing out to the contextual factor in living together with the siblings. Such results are in agreement with Carreirão (2005) and Almeida (2009), where the researched institutions cannot come through with the statutory principle of non-rupture of the siblings group.

The right to live in a family and a community is upheld by law (Lei n. 8.069, 1990 e Lei n. 12.010/09), understood as the right to live with the member of the family under the protection of responsible parents, as well as making part of the life in the community where the family lives. With regards to the group of siblings this right is extended to those siblings that are under a protective measure in a shelter, understanding that, keeping them together in the same place, under the conditions to build or to keep their family ties is one of the ways to preserve this right. Therefore, it is considered that the organization of the structure and the routine of the institution, based on the age range of the children, gives little privileged to the maintenance or development of affective bonds among the groups of siblings.

Another factor that must be highlighted is that the children are **recidivist**, that means that the children return to their original family and are still subjected to risky situations, having to go back to being sheltered. This is a very special issue, as it is questioned how the follow up has been made with the egress and why they are going back to the shelter institutions. The technical orientations for the sheltering of children and adolescents (Brasil, 2009) state that the actions to be taken by the support team of the institutions must begin since the child is accepted, aiming at making the families aware of the reasons that lead to the distancing of the child and/or adolescent and the consequences that may come from this fact. This awareness is essential for actions to be developed to contribute to overcoming adverse situations or disruptive patterns that lead to distancing.

Concerning the family bonds, the findings indicate that the children receive little visitations from the families, neighbors or friends, corroborating IPEA's (Silva, 2004) data in which only 58.2% of the children received visitations, in addition to Serrados's (2008) research, in which such percentage drops to 55%. It is believed that such fact happens by contextual conditions of the researched institution, in which the child visits are scheduled by the staff, setting the days, time and durations.

On the weekends visitation happens only if previously scheduled with the responsible for the case. The feasibility of the contact between the housed and the family is a right for the child and adolescents, and this contact must be made easier and stimulated by the institution and by those that intermediate the process of sheltering, such as the Child and Youth Court and Guardianship Counsel. Therefore, the argument that making it easier and stimulating the visitation is the immediate way of attending the principle of preservation of family bonds after the sheltering, with a desirable flexibility facing the needs of family and children. This argument is reinstated by Guara's (2006) and Oliveira's (2006) study that demonstrate that flexible schedules for visitation help families that frequently feel blamed for or punished by the sheltering of their children.

Still on the family living, when comparing the time spent with the family and the time in the institution, the results show that most children have spent more time sheltered than with their biological families, demonstrating that the institution, as well as the family, have been working as a broad context for the human development, in their first years of life, as pointed out by Bronfenbrenner (1996). The principles of exceptionality and temporality for the institutional sheltering as a measure of special protection for children and adolescent in personal and social risk, whose rights have been unattended and violated, as well as the right to live in a family and a community, upheld by the CAS, have not been respected, for in the present study the children have the institution as their home, spending most of their lives in shelters and away from their families, parents and family as a whole, who pay little or no visitations to the children, as for the siblings that are in other institutions, separated by the age criteria.

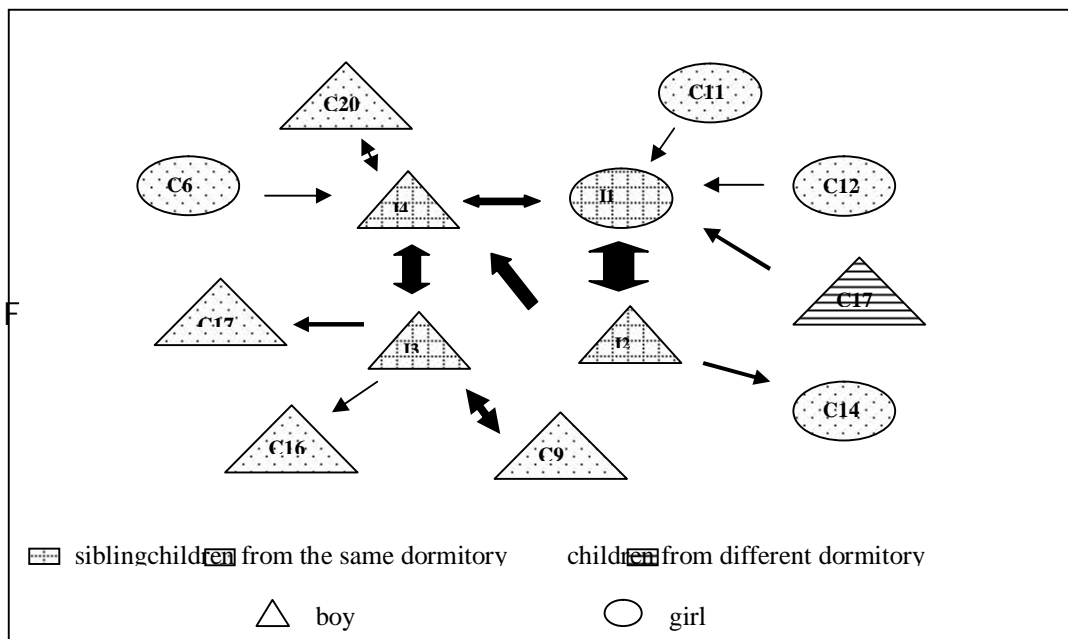
The Interaction Partners

By analyzing the interactions between siblings and their peers it was identified a total of 104 interactive episodes, from which, in more than half (64) the interactions took place between siblings. In 32 episodes the peers were children from the same dormitory and in eight episodes there were children from different dormitories.

Therefore, the children from the group have more interaction with their siblings, acting as emitters and receivers of the actions. Between the twins (I1 and I2) in total, 27 interactive episodes were registered, and between I3 and I4 34 episodes were registered, a frequency higher than the ones with other partners, including the ones from the same dormitory.

All the children (I1, I2 and I3) looked for the oldest brother (I4) to interact. It was possible to notice that, with the exception of I3, who interacted only with I4, the other children of the group interacted with all the siblings.

Regarding the time spent in the interactions, when focal-subject, I1 was 13 minutes interacting with its peers, five of these minutes were for interacting with the twin and three minutes and thirty seconds with the other children from the same dormitory. On the other hand, I2 had 21 minutes of interaction, 15 from which was spent with the twin sister (I1). The sibling 3 (I3), on its turn, spent 18 minutes and 30 seconds of interactions with its peers, from which it spent six minutes and 30 seconds was destined for the siblings. With these data it was built a sociometric representation of the interactions among the siblings, as portrayed in Figure 1. Only the children who interacted for more than 30 seconds with the focal-subject were demonstrated.



By analyzing Figure 1, it is noted that the siblings interacted more among themselves in the shelter, and that the interactions between I1 and I2 were longer and more frequent, showing the preference for that peer. This result might be connected to the fact that they are twins and are living in the same dormitory.

The Figure shows a significant difference of interaction between siblings that are in the same dormitory and those from different ones, regarding the time spent and the frequency of the interactions. Besides, it was observed a longer time in the interactions between I3 and I4, despite the fact they are in different dormitories, whenever they had the opportunity to be interacting with children from different dorms they were seen.

Such data are in agreement with Serrano (2008) in which 258 children that lived in 4 different shelters in Ribeirão Preto were characterized, and it was observed that 78% of the children aging from zero to six years old, had siblings.

The preservation of the ties between them was associated to the following conditions: 1) they were sheltered together; 2) could return to the original family together; 3) received visitation from the siblings in the shelter; 4) spent the weekend with the family and had other situations for meeting; and 5) they met even being in different shelters or they would see each other at school.

Similarly to the results found by Serrano (2008), with regards to the contextual factors that have influence in maintaining the tie between siblings, the present study found, in group 1, a higher number of siblings sheltered together (4), the presence of a couple of twins in the same dormitory, and favoring the moments of encounters with the other siblings sheltered in different institutions, in addition to the fact that the focal subjects study in the same school. These contextual factors may have enabled a greater interaction among the siblings of this group, in comparison to the other groups of siblings.

It was also verified that I4, the oldest sibling, was the target of interaction of all the siblings, being reciprocated to I1 and I3. Such result is similar to Alexandre and Vieira's (2004), who studied the attachment relation between institutionalized children and were trying to demonstrate how, in the relationships of affection and care established, the roles played by older siblings have a special and specific importance for the development of social, affective and cognitive development of the younger ones. However, despite the institutional dynamic little favor the contact of siblings, for they are separated in rooms according to their age and the activities such as meals, visits to the toy library, and educational activities being mostly divided according to the dormitories, such moments that enable interactions between the sibling, when they are in the same space, are enjoyed. This is evident when it is analyzed the content of interactions developed between siblings and the other children.

The document 'Technical orientation for the sheltering of children and adolescent' (Brasil, 2009) focus on the norms and guidelines to make the sheltering of children and adolescents transitory though reparative. To that matter, it emphasizes the preservation and the strengthening of the bonds with the family and the community. According to the document, these bonds are essential to provide basic conditions for a healthy development, which favors the formation of its identity and its construction as a subject and as a citizen. In this sense, children and adolescents that are relatives must not be separated when sent to sheltering services, the opposite may be put to practice only if it there is the interest or desire of the child, or clear risk of violence.

For the children and adolescents that were already apart from their family it is especially important to preserve and strengthen their fraternal bonds and kinship, which may contribute for the formation of their identity, preservation of the family history and familiar reference. For that reason, it is important for the sheltering services to be organized in a way the group of siblings or other kinship can be attended together, even with different age range and gender.

O Conteúdo Das Interações

This section presents the content of the interactions developed between the children (siblings, children from the same dormitory and from different ones), based on the adapted categories of Lopes (2007) and Cavalcante (2008). Figure 2 shows the absolute frequency of interactions between the siblings. From the total of 104 interactive episodes between the child and its peer, 64 episodes were between siblings, predominantly in the categories of searching for closeness (20), affection (16) followed by cooperation (14), and behavior similarity (7).

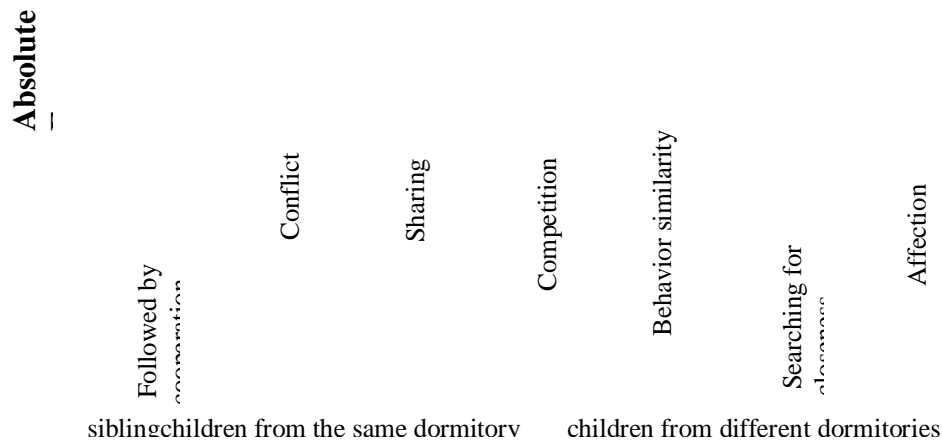


Figure 2: Frequency of Interactive Categories by the Type of Partnership in the Group of Siblings (n=64)

By analyzing the figure it can be noted that the children would interact more with the sibling, followed by the interactions with the children from the same dormitory, and, at last, with children from different dormitories, with differences in the content of the interactions. The search for closeness was the most frequent category between siblings, making it clear that even when the institution doesn't favor siblings to be near each other they look for each other and try to interact. The affection category was the second most frequent between siblings. Such findings point to existence of the sibling as a subsidiary figure of affection, once the categories searching for closeness and affection were the most common in groups, agreeing with the perspective of Bowlby (1969/2002) which highlights that the child looks for the subsidiary figure of affection when: it is hungry, sick, tired, and scared; it doesn't trust the other person to stay by its side, therefore, it seeks closeness and tries to keep affective contact.

Almeida (2009) on his study about the siblings relationship found out from the interviews with the children that the siblings sheltered in the same institution were the most common people mention when considered in the social network of the children.

Not only in Almeida's study, also in this one, physical proximity and contact are indicated for enabling the maintenance of the bond between siblings, for they ease the sharing of the experiences and feelings, which strengthen the relationship along the time.

Carreño and Avilla (2002) indicate that the child, since two years old, tend to amplify its behavior of attachment towards others, generally are those that replace the mother when absent and provide the necessary care to its protection. In these situations in which the person responsible for the daily care is replaced, as it happens in the institutional care, there appears the subsidiary figure of affection, frequently someone from its family life. Hence, the experience of an intimate and long relationship with the sibling who provides daily care may create favorable conditions for the definition of other attachment figures in the childhood. A similar result was found by Alexandre and Vieira (2004) in which the institutionalized children that were part of the study kept affective relationship one with the other, being the relationship with the siblings and the peers was characterized mainly by the emphasis on the physical contact and constant presence of the other.

It is important to call attention that such children show themselves to be resilient, and that can be related to the fact that they can count on a set of protection factors, including the positive affective bonds with the older siblings that live in the same shelter or with the staff of the shelter.

The studies from Alexandre and Vieira (2004), Carreño and Avilla (2002), Cavalcante (2008), and Petean and Suguihura (2005) demonstrated that the relationship between tied peers, as can be called the siblings, tend to be more intense and affective than with occasional peers. Therefore, siblings in special conditions as the institutionalization, may represent a subsidiary figure of attachment, chiefly when considering the younger siblings towards the older ones. However, it was also observed that in some cases, the coetaneous, more than the siblings, are working as subsidiary figure of attachment

The similarities of behavior was predominant in the pair of twins. About that, Hinde (1976) considers the group to have strong influence on the way of individual to think and act.

Thus, the child has the tendency to imitate the people that they consider more similar to itself, in other words, it imitates coetaneous more frequently than adults and non coetaneous, or activities that is seen as more similar to the one it is performing (Camaioni, 1980). For Cavalcante (2008), considering children in general, especially those that live in institutions, the control to dictate behaviors and attitudes is due to imitation, pretty common for the age researched, to the physical proximity that facilitate the group cohesion and the strategies of social adjustments of the individual.

Competition had little frequency among the children, regardless of the age and the kinship, a fact that calls attention, once the children share toys, objects, and clothes in the institution, creating little competitiveness among them. On the other hand, sharing and cooperation categories were present among the siblings, being predominant between peers from the same dormitory, including the couple of twins, from the same dormitory, for they would predominantly target these behaviors towards the sibling. This findings corroborate those of Cavalcante (2008) in which the actions described as helping, cooperating, sharing and, comforting, were ways the children used for helping the most constant peers in their immediate environment, usually the children connected to a same dormitory due to its age. Cavalcante (2008) explain that in situations children share their fears and anguish, clothes and food, affection and protection in the institutional environment, it is more important than other ways of behavior and social interaction, therefore it should be acknowledged for the preservation of mental health, social skills training and growth of the human potential.

The child-child interactions in shelter institutions, mainly involving siblings dyads seem to be as important for the child development as those one that involves adults. The complexity of the relations established between peers is based on the fact that they have several potential meanings, capable of creating different motivations or even conflicting ones. In certain circumstances, the child is the responsible for taking care of the partner, and, in other moments, it can be the target of behaviors that denote care, affection, attachment, search for closeness, cooperation, and sharing (Cavalcante, Magalhães & Costa, 2012). Generally, differences were found in the content of the interactions between siblings and the other sheltered children, despite the fact that in several cases it was more common between coetaneous, by the limitations imposed by the institution's organization, despite that, the siblings tried do value each opportunity for approaching, looking to maintain the family living.

The Technical Orientations for Sheltering Children and Adolescents (Brasil, 2009) consider to be important the preservation and strengthening of the stories of life and family references.

Final Considerations

This study aimed at analyzing the interactions between siblings and their peers in an institutional environment, based on the contextual conditions of the sheltering institutions and how they influence the maintenance of bonds among siblings.

Deliberating on the organization of the area in order to favor the bonds between siblings the best strategy would be to have specific rooms to welcome siblings, even in an institution with 50 sheltered children. This should be considered a priority, as much as feeding and sheltering.

In the group of siblings studied, the family rupture began by the partition of the siblings into different institutions, according to gender and age, and those that were sheltered in the same institution were separated due to their age into different dormitories. Despite that, the results demonstrate an effort of the siblings to be close to each other and interact, even if the institution doesn't encourage their contact. In these cases some differences were found in the content of the interactions between the siblings and the other children, demonstrating that the interactions among siblings were richer in affection and cooperation than those that involved occasional partners, as it was demonstrated by Carreño and Avilla (2002), and Cavalcante (2008).

In order to change the reality seen in the research some urgent changes in the institution would be necessary in reference to reordering, as it is stated by the CAS, or in short term, restructuring the institution in a way to allow an approximation to what it is stated in CAS. Even though many initiatives are offered in that sense, the institutional dynamic of shelters, in general, still needs to be reconsidered so it can effectively make a breach with the previous model. This study brings some deliberations that may contribute with everyone that interacts with the children in institutional shelters, either that being the staff, the court, community councils, and Public Ministry, contributing for the work of these professionals and institutions as well as aiding the restructuring of the shelters in this region.

Based on this study and the literature it is stated that there is the necessity to invest more in studies that might better understand the quality of convivial of the children in the shelter, aiming at acknowledging the elements that are present in the interactions between siblings.

It was acknowledged that siblings have relationships among themselves, not just interactions, for they carry in their memory past interactions lived and that such interactions happened along the time and have a pattern, as stated by Hinde (1976). It is then suggested a longitudinal study investigating how the interactions are developed in time and its pattern, trying to approach the study of the relationships dimension.

The research pointed out an urgency to implement the legal predictions in the reality and in the everyday living of the shelters, therefore it is necessary capacitating the professionals involved in the protection measure of children and adolescents (government, managers of institutions, counsels) and in the shelter services (family, staff, educators, and children) in a work that enables the full development of children and adolescents who went through abandonment, negligence, and violent situations, granting their own and their family's rights.

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