# International Journal of Human Sciences Research

# THE RETURN OF INSTITUTIONALIZED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AND A DIALOGUE WITH PSYCHOLOGY

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### INTRODUCTION

This article aims to address the return of institutionalized children and adolescents, after the regular process of adoption and living with their adoptive parents, as well as the resulting affective implications.

Adoption is a form of parental affiliation, provided for by law and supported by socio-affective bonds with the objective of providing children and adolescents with the primary right of "family and community coexistence", guaranteed by the Federal Constitution and the Statute of the Child and the Child. Adolescent.

The Legislative Power, when creating the adoption institute, aimed to safeguard and protect children and adolescents who were in a shelter system and without the possibility of returning to their family of origin, either because of abandonment, or because of the impossibility of raising and educating them. Adoption tries to make up for the absence of the family and facilitate a new stable affective bond, such measure being irrevocable. It starts from the understanding that once the child is adopted, he/she has the same condition as a biological child, with all rights, including inheritance. Although there are successful cases in the construction of the affective bond between adopter and adopted, in which the relationship between parents and children is established, the number of unsuccessful cases that resulted in the return or return of the child or adolescent to the host institution is significant, bringing to adopted a re-edition of the helplessness he experienced upon arriving at the shelter for the first time.

Although the constitutive court decision that granted the adoption has an irrevocable character, it does not have the power to guarantee an unshakable family coexistence. Therefore, it is necessary for the magistrates to weigh the conditions in which the child or adolescent is and decide for the least harm to

them, which often coincides with accepting the restitution of the adopted, to avoid greater suffering for these people. It is understood as suffering, the possible and eventual mistreatment or attitudes of rejection.

# HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF ABANDONMENT OF CHILDREN

The abandonment of children is a practice that comes from antiquity, varying only in the social context, motivations, causes and circumstances. From a historical perspective, we realize that in the Middle Ages, children were left on "wheels" - hollow wooden cylinder, revolving -, which were built on the wall of a church and charity hospital, where these children were deposited at their own disposal. luck. In Brazil, in the colonial period, this device was named "Roda dos Expostos" or "Wheel Founders Wheel", and it was implemented due to the growing number of babies who were abandoned on the streets, in filthy places, at the mercy of time and animals that devoured them before they were found.

From the 18th century onwards, abandoned childhood became an emergency social and political issue. Many families, influenced by the religious feeling of charity, began to welcome abandoned and unprotected children, a common and widespread practice in the 18th century and still propagated today (MARCÍLIO, 1998, p.67).

Despite the paradigm shifts regarding the way in which the child was contemplated, child abandonment and violence continued to be part of the various social classes in the contemporary world, especially in the poorest families. Factors such as occupation with work, lack of family material resources, illness, chemical dependency, imprisonment of parents or guardians, sexual abuse, orphanhood, begging, domestic violence and abandonment would be the main reasons for families and the Public Power to see the

reception as the only support option found to reduce the suffering of children (SILVA, 2002 apud ORIONTE, SOUZA, 2007).

The report by the National Council of the Public Ministry (CNMP) released the results of annual inspections carried out by childhood and youth promoters carried out in 2013 and pointed to negligence and dependence on alcohol and other drugs as the main causes of child abandonment. and adolescents by their parents in Brazil and which resulted in institutional care. With chemical dependency, parents can become aggressive, neglectful and violent, leaving their children to fend for themselves. The study pointed out other no less expressive causes for the abandonment of children by their parents, firstly, due to negligence and then, due to domestic violence, sexual abuse and homelessness (CNMP,  $2013)^{1}$ .

Due to the vulnerability of children and adolescents, the State suggests as an option, on a provisional basis, the reception in shelters, at least until the families can restructure and this way, come to pick up their children. However, there is also a need for protection for these dysfunctional families through public policies, given that, in the absence of attention and care for these social groups, the possibilities of children returning to the family nucleus become reduced, a scenario this is frequent in the Brazilian context, in which the number of receptions in the various institutions spread across the country increases (CNMP, 2013).

# PERSPECTIVES ON STATE PROTECTION AND CURRENT LEGISLATION IN BRAZIL

Faced with the abandonment of children, in 1990 Law 8,069 was enacted, enshrined as the "Statute of Children and Adolescents (ECA)", later amended in some provisions by

Law 13,309, of 11.05.2017, which specifically regulates the model of integral protection advocated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the UN - United Nations (BRASIL, 1990). In line with the Civil Code (BRAZIL, 1916-2002) and the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), the State finally assumes its responsibility for the assistance to children and adolescents, proclaiming the family as the basis of society and affirming these people as subjects of law.

The "Child and Adolescent Statute" replaced the "Minor Code" (Lei nº 6.697/79)2 called the "Mello Mattos Code", in honor of the author of the project, José Cândido de Albuquerque Mello Mattos. The legislation was aimed at people classified "abandoned", "exposed", "needy" or perpetrators of infractions and, therefore, subject to protection by law. From the "Statute of Children and Adolescents", these people started to be considered citizens in a peculiar stage of development and, therefore, subjects of rights and duties. For the realization of these rights, the ECA established a new institutional order in which bodies responsible for policies aimed at these age groups (child and youth) were created, through a Rights Guarantee System, which includes the "Guardianship Council" (Council of Guardianship), (FONSECA, 2016).

The new Statute had the objective of ensuring the physical, mental, spiritual and social development of children and adolescents, in conditions of freedom and dignity, in addition to highlighting the right to be raised and educated within their family and - exceptionally - in a surrogate family, which seeks to guarantee family and community coexistence for their development (BRASIL, 1990).

<sup>1.</sup> CNMP - National Council of the Public Ministry - Welcome Report. Year: 2013

<sup>2.</sup> The Minors Code represented the first Systematic Minors Code in the country and Latin America José Cândido de Albuquerque Mello Mattos was the first juvenile judge in Rio de Janeiro. Considered as the "Apostle of the Abandoned Childhood".

Such rights are mentioned in article 227 of the Federal Constitution <sup>3</sup>, where it appears that the family, society and the State have a duty to support children and adolescents. It must be noted that the family, although it has a decisive role in the formation and development of these individuals, as it is the first social group for the subject to be inserted and is a source of health promotion, in its extreme, the family can also favor the production of diseases. and countless losses for children and adolescents resulting from issues generated by social life (BRASIL, 1988).

When these Fundamental Rights of the child are violated, institutional shelter becomes an alternative as a protection measure offered by the State (BRASIL, 1990). Institutions were created to serve children and adolescents who for some reason have been abandoned or separated from their family, where they will remain - exceptionally, and on a provisional basis - until they can return to their natural family or be placed in another home, a substitute home. Despite the divergent considerations, studies show that in serious situations in the family, the institution can still be the best option for support and affection for the child.

According to Orionte and Souza (2007), there is no doubt that the shelter as an institution fulfills a social function, however, it is important to reflect on the form of subjectivation of these children not individually, but also in the social context in which they are constituted, because in addition to the separation from their family of origin, which often occurs abruptly, they go through the experience of living with totally strangers, in an environment shared with many other children who are also

unknown, without covering any relationship of belonging to that space.

Furthermore, due to the bureaucracy of the child/adolescent reintegration process, the shelter that must be temporary, can become permanent. Children who are ignored by their natural family face social invisibility and uncertainty about the future. The State - aiming to alleviate the situation of children and adolescents in shelters for many years, without the possibility of returning to their families of origin - has no alternative, other than adoption, especially in compliance with the current law that aims to guarantee family coexistence.

### ADOPTION AND THE ADOPTION PROCESS IN BRAZIL AND ITS CHALLENGES

The adoption, currently governed by Law 12.010, of August 3, 2009, called the "National Adoption Law" is characterized as an exceptional and irreversible measure, as provided by the legislation in force (Articles: 9, 39, § 1, ECA, 2009).

Adoption would be the last alternative among the public policies to be taken, always with the aim of meeting the best interests of the child and adolescent. To this end, Judges, prosecutors and the Public Defender's Office must exhaust all means to keep the child or adolescent with their biological parents or natural family, giving priority to the child's reintegration into their family environment (MADALENO, 2018).

In order to favor greater agility in the adoption processes and reduce the length of stay in shelters, the "National Adoption Law" created the "National Registry", maintaining the registry in regional districts, to facilitate the meeting of children and adolescents suitable

<sup>3.</sup> Article 227. It is the duty of the family, society and the State to guarantee children, adolescents and young people, with absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community coexistence, in addition to protecting them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Wording given by Constitutional Amendment, number: 65 of 2010).

for adoption. and qualified candidates. The law limits the stay of minors in the foster care program to 02 (two) years, extendable in case of need (ECA Art. 19, §2, BRAZIL, 1990).

In practice, however, we found that the effect was inverse and that children and adolescents spent more than this time in shelters. This is due to the State's attempts to look for the family of origin or to wait for it to recover and come to pick up the child, which can last for several years or never happen. In the meantime, candidates or prospective adopters, in addition to losing the chance to share the child's early childhood, end up giving up on the chosen profile. When they finally make the child available for adoption, there is a risk that there will be no more interest in this process, as they are older (DIAS, 2017, p. 508).

The candidate who demonstrates interest in adopting, in accordance with the National Adoption Law nº 12.010 of 2009, must attend a Child and Youth Court and qualify and, after fulfilling the legal requirements and approval, register in the local registry and applicants, then undergoing courses and psychosocial assessment, home visits and technical interviews with the interprofessional team of the Judiciary. At this stage, the applicant will fill out a register describing the characteristics of the child or adolescent he intends to adopt, presenting his expectations and motivations in relation to adoption. The applicant for adoption, considered fit, will remain in the registry waiting to be called in the event of the appearance of a child or adolescent with their profile, and may visit shelters and institutions in search of this meeting, provided they follow the legal guidelines (BRASIL 2009).

After granting the applicant's application for registration and choosing the profile of the child or adolescent, the mandatory stage of coexistence will be promoted - and can only be waived, according to Gonçalves (2018, p.192)

- "if the adoptee is under the guardianship or legal custody of the adopter for a sufficient time for it to be possible to assess the desirability of establishing the bond".

During this period, adopters have legal custody of the child, which is provisional, and may, upon justification, be revoked at any time. During the cohabitation internship period, the law allows the withdrawal, considering that the adoption has not yet occurred (ECA, Art. 34, § 2; Art 35. BRASIL, 1990).

It happens, however, that some adopters accept the child or adolescent and, after some time of coexistence, return them. The rupture of this bond is worrying and deserves attention, not only because of the violation of legal rights, but because of the suffering that comes from this return or refund mechanism to solve a problem or relational discomfort (GHIRARDI, 2015).

### PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW: A POSSIBLE DIALOGUE ABOUT THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The procedure for returning the adopted child follows the same process as the abandonment of a biological child, that is, it is placed back in an institution. In view of what we can observe in the literature, the return is a reality and, even violating the law, the magistrates feel obliged to accept the child or adolescent and put them back in the shelter to avoid that their stay in the family nucleus can bring them greater suffering, sometimes making them victims of mistreatment, abuse and humiliation (GONÇALVES, 2018).

Adopting a child or adolescent, as argued by Schettini Filho (2008, apud RIEDE; SARTORI, 2013), requires a clear awareness of motherhood/fatherhood as a condition for the dream of affective procreation to become a reality both in the lives of parents and children. In the beginning there is

the enchantment phase, but after the days, months and years of relationship, both – adopters and adopted people – start to live in a more intimate way and in this period that fantasy and reality are face to face. In the daily confrontation, both the child and the parents begin to realize that the desired is far beyond reality. This phase is outlined as the period of discoveries, identifications, differences and affinities, requiring the search for help, especially therapeutic, under penalty of making coexistence so unbearable that it can result in a failed adoption, culminating in the return of the child to the institution.

## MULTIPLE REASONS FOR RETURNING THE CHILD

In the adoption process, adoptive parents of children and adolescents present different reasons for the return or return to the institution. For Souza and Casanova (2018), the return of the adopted child represents a failure in the process, despite all the efforts of professionals, social workers, psychologists and judicial technicians, in addition to preparation courses and technical interviews. It is hypothesized that the long wait of the suitors in the adoption process, the insufficient period of coexistence, combined immaturity and the emotional unpreparedness of the parents, as well as the child and adolescent, contribute to this failure. However, other reasons are pointed out as causes for the return, starting with the expectation of the suitors, after all, some people dream and idealize a child according to their desire (ideal child), however, the expectation may not correspond to reality (real child).

Given this context, it is necessary to verify how much of the narcissistic investment is behind this subjective desire to adopt. Subjective constructions, if not identified, tend to confuse affective relationships, because what does not exist is expected, being necessary, in the case of adoption, to mourn the ideal child to accept and love that child or adolescent chosen to adopt, with all their characteristics and difficulties (SOUZA; CASANOVA, 2018).

In the literature, we realize that not a few resort to adoption, often sustained by the feeling of mourning, the experience of abortions, the loss of a child or as an alternative to infertility (FRANCO, 2016).

In these cases, every time the adopter looks at the adopted child, he remembers his grief and the child he did not generate, a context that sends him to suffering and frustration. In these cases, sometimes, the return is inevitable, as they prefer to return the child to remembering their biological failure or the child they dreamed of or idealized as their own, but which was not found (SOUZA, 2012).

The physical aspect of the child, their language, behavior, life history, ethnicity and origin, overload of activities, tiredness and physical exhaustion due to work with food, school life, illness, sleepless nights, also bother some adopters. This new family dynamic is a problem for some couples, who also feel invaded in their privacy, cut off from their freedom. (SOUZA, CASANOVA, 2018).

This new family dynamic is a problem for some couples, who also feel invaded in their privacy, cut off from their freedom. When they have other children, parents can feel even more burdened for not knowing how to manage the tasks and, with some frequency, it can happen that they need to deal with affective aspects related to siblings, such as jealousy, envy and resistance of the children generated to with the adoptees.

Other reasons influence the return of the adopted child to the institution, such as, for example, the child who begins to have health problems or chronic disease when being taken home, and the parents feel incapable of treating him/her. In this context, parents also often express narratives that they were deceived, as they claim they were not informed to prevent themselves or give up before the adoption process, sometimes justifying the lack of financial resources for the necessary care. Among other complaints from parents who resort to returning their children, are related to sexuality, bad behavior, lying, rebelliousness, petty theft, disobedience, limit testing and psychological regression, experienced by some children (SOUZA, 2012).

According to Souza and Casanova (2018), psychological regression is a "rebirth" of the child in that family. The child relives his 1st childhood, wetting the bed, wanting to crawl, talking like a baby, asking for a pacifier and a bottle, getting into his mother's clothes pretending to be born again. It is as if these children are expressing the opportunity to be reborn, to start over, to redesign their little story. Although it is a positive sign, many parents do not accept this situation and express inability to deal with this phase, which, although complex, is usually brief.

The authors warn about another common situation, known as testing. In this context, the child and adolescent do everything to get the attention of the parents and see their limit to know if they are accepted, especially those who already have a history of other returns, since they have already gone through this more than once.

For Winnicott (2011), testing is a common behavior in children and adolescents. In this context, they present the need to test their parents to verify if they can trust them, and this practice can be perpetuated until an older age, until they feel more secure. Teenagers, for example, test your orders, your rules, your limits. The likely response to this testing by adults is the discovery of strong feelings

and emotions that worry and sometimes frighten them. This way, it is necessary to test the means of security that they received since early childhood, as well as a strategy for them to feel safe and trust fully again.

However, not only the adopters present reasons for the child's return to the shelter, other causes that guide the return, this time, by the adoptees, such as: mistreatment, abuse, parental neglect, missing the institution for the time and familiarity with this space, lack of companions or siblings who have left there, in addition to strong memories of the family of origin. In addition to the reasons given for returning to the shelter, the lack of adaptation to the new rules - which not infrequently - promotes the adopted feeling of not belonging to the new family, as if they were strangers to the new family nucleus. Thus, many adoptees feel that that new group is not configured as their real family, thus causing discomfort and anguish (SOUZA, 2012).

According to Souza and Casanova (2018), children and adolescents receive an "emotional beating" and the bigger the adopted, the greater the trauma, in addition to having the frustration of losing the house where they lived, the school and the benefits. materials. In some cases, with the return, the child is provisionally left out of the new adoption list in order to be assisted by psychologists and other professionals to overcome the lived experience.

There is no doubt that return is a delicate and complex issue and not every child can resist the experience of unsuccessful postadoption. The majority lacking affection does not understand this recurrence of abandonment or abuse and relives the trauma of abandonment, repeating the returns as many times as they are (SOUZA, 2014).

### CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The pain and anguish caused by the feeling of rejection and the lack of understanding of the reason that led their adoptive parents to return them, can lead them to unpredictable emotional states. Many children present from depression, low self-esteem, fear, low physical and cognitive development to serious diseases that threaten their health. The child can go into crisis, feel humiliated, belittled, lose hope, and be afraid to get attached again (SOUZA, 2012).

Author Souza (2012) illustrates this situation through a case report of a returned child who, when he returned to the institution, crawled under the bed and only came out to go to the bathroom and eat. We also highlight the case of a young man who developed "emotional blindness", unable to see anything, even though his eyes were clinically healthy. The lack of someone to whom he could cling and who could welcome him exactly as he was, favored the emergence of very complex symptoms.

Sadness, indignation and revolt can also be expressed in older children and adolescents who present behaviors forged to defend themselves from the trauma of abandonment, such as indifference, coldness and others, appearing to express hostility and aggression. These children may also express a desire not to be adopted, fearing further disillusionment and suffering.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Faced with the challenges in the adoption process, which also involve psychic aspects, such as the idealization of the desired child, the reissue of conflicts between both adopters and adoptees, among other issues, the need to further expand the dialogues between Law,

Psychology and its approaches, delimiting the conceptual boundaries of each area.

As previously mentioned, the return of the adopted person is not foreseen in the legal system, since the adoption is an exceptional measure and its constitutive sentence is irrevocable, as provided for in § 1 of article 39 of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent. However, the number of unsuccessful adoptions is growing, implying the inevitable return of children to institutions, in most cases, with emotional shocks that can compromise their development, above all, a new socialization.

In this rescue work, several situations can emerge in the therapeutic setting, such as fears and anxieties related to separation, distrust in establishing new bonds. In this context, the therapist, while occupying a place of fundamental importance to welcome this affective burden and help the child in the elaboration process, will also play the role of protection, becoming the target of the projections of these anxieties and fears. It is necessary that these projections occur in the therapeutic environment with a professional and not with the adoptive parents or prospective adopters during the Coexistence Stage. This proposal is justified because not all parents are sufficiently prepared, a reason that influences many candidates to give up adoption or return the children to the shelter (PEITER 2016, p.57).

Thus, given the complexity and delicacy of the proposed theme, which raises reflections in the legal and social scope, it is not intended to conclude the dialogues suggested here, but to contribute to new research on affective issues in the return of institutionalized children and adolescents, from the interface between Law and the area of Psychology and Psychoanalysis.

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