

GROUP OF HEARING MOTHERS OF DEAF CHILDREN: INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE REPORT

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ABSTRACT. This experience report describes a group phenomenon, based upon a case study of a group of hearing mothers of deaf children. The weekly group, in operation for over three years, provides support for families with deaf children. At first, observations were made in the group for a subsequent analysis of the data and act on interventions. Categories containing the main features that emerged in the group were created in order to discuss the content found. The categories addressed by mothers included: independence/autonomy of the child; adolescence and sexuality; discovery of deafness and reorganization of family dynamics; and matters beyond the group goal. As for the categories related to the group process there are: resistance; containing function of the coordinator; transfer; interventions in the group field. The results lead to understanding the group as a facilitator and as a necessary support for the participants. Before that, interventions were carried out to expand the space for reflection offered by the group, which provides adaptations to the different situations experienced by the participants.

Keywords: Group; hearing disorders; family.

GRUPO DE MÃES OUVINTES DE FILHOS SURDOS: RELATO DE UMA EXPERIÊNCIA DE ESTÁGIO

RESUMO. Neste relato de experiência realizou-se uma compreensão acerca do fenômeno grupal, amparando-se no estudo de caso de um grupo de mães ouvintes com filhos surdos. O grupo semanal, em funcionamento há mais de três anos, proporciona um espaço de apoio às famílias de surdos. Em um primeiro momento, foram realizadas observações no grupo para, posteriormente, analisar-se os dados e atuar em intervenções. A fim de se discutir os conteúdos encontrados, criaram-se eixos temáticos com as principais características que emergiram no grupo. Quanto à temática abordada pelas mães, há independência/autonomia do filho; adolescência e sexualidade; descoberta da surdez e reorganização da dinâmica familiar; e assuntos além do objetivo grupal. E, quanto ao processo grupal: resistência; função continente do coordenador; transferência; intervenções no campo grupal. Os resultados conduzem à compreensão do grupo como facilitador e necessário como apoio e suporte para as participantes. Diante disso, realizaram-se intervenções no sentido de ampliar o espaço de reflexão, oferecido pelo grupo, o qual propicia adequação às diferentes situações vivenciadas pelas participantes.

Palavras-chave: Grupos; distúrbios da audição; família.

GRUPO DE OYENTES MADRES DE NIÑOS SORDOS: INFORME DE EXPERIENCIA EN EL ESCENARIO

RESUMEN. En este informe de experiencia celebrado un entendimiento sobre el fenómeno de grupo refugiarse en el estudio de caso de un grupo de madres de audición con los niños sordos. El grupo semanal, en funcionamiento desde hace más de tres años, ofrece un espacio de apoyo a las familias sordas. En el primer momento, las observaciones se hicieron en el grupo para luego analizarse los datos y actuar sobre las intervenciones. Con el fin de discutir el contenido

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que se encuentra, se creó temas con las características principales que surgieron en el grupo. En cuanto al tema abordado por las madres han: la independencia / autonomía del niño; la adolescencia y la sexualidad; descubrimiento de la sordera y la reorganización de la dinámica familiar; y asuntos más allá del objetivo del grupo. Y en cuanto al proceso de grupo tenemos: la fuerza; la función del coordinador continente; transferir; intervenciones en el campo de grupo. Los resultados conducen a la comprensión del grupo como un facilitador y el apoyo que sea necesario y apoyo a los participantes. Por lo tanto, hubo intervenciones para ampliarse el espacio de reflexión ofrecida por el grupo, que proporciona la adaptación a diferentes situaciones experimentadas por los participantes.

Palabras-clave: Grupo; trastornos de la audición; familia.

Introduction

This experience report is the result of two disciplines of the graduation course in Psychology, namely *Estágio Básico III* ("Basic internship III" – EBIII) and *Estágio Básico IV* ("Basic Internship IV" - EBIV). The aim of the discipline EBIII was observing an operating group, make an understanding of it, provide a diagnosis and develop alternative proposals. Subsequently, in EBIV, the proposed interventions should be applied in the group observed. This process of observation and interventions occurred during one year. With the aim of understanding the group movement and the deafness process, a group of mothers, in operation in an institution in the Brazilian State Rio Grande do Sul was used as our study object. The group gathers weekly, and has been in operation for more than three years, providing a supporting space to the families of deaf children, once the group contains the emerging demands.

The institution where the group gathers is of public character, kept with resources from Federal, State and City Government, as well as from donations. The board of directors is composed by Rotary members. It offers specialized technical care in the areas of phonoaudiology, psychology, drama and art workshops and social work. The service can be accessed by means of referrals from the city network, local schools and from *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Brazilian Unified Health System– SUS). This the institution aims at creating conditions for people who have difficulties concerning audio-communication issues, contributing to the exercise of citizenship and social participation, by means of prevention, habilitation and rehabilitation. In this sense, the care of the deaf provides opportunities of a more positive integration to their family, community and society, valuing their emancipation and autonomy. For the present study, a bibliographical analysis on deafness and support to families that face this reality was carried out, emphasizing the aspects observed during the data collection in loco and the interventions carried out by the coordinator of the group, the psychologist of the institution. Afterwards, the interventions were carried out by two interns.

The deafness in contemporary society

Deafness is characterized as an alteration of the hearing system and/or on the auditory pathways that interferes in the access to sound stimuli. The hearing alterations depend on the intensity of the loss, varying from milder to more severe ones; on the moment of the loss, which can be before or after language acquisition; on the location of the loss (Nunes, Saia, Silva, & Mimessi, 2015).

In Brazil, there are 9.7 million hearing impaired people; a number of 616.2 thousand of them are aged between 0 and 14 years (IBGE, 2010). Before this fact, Silva and Golçalves (2013) claim that it is important for the health care professionals to allow the early diagnosis and the family support, as well as carry out the necessary procedures. The adequate family supporting actions and the provision of pertinent information will influence the acceptance of deafness in its linguistic, political, social and cultural aspects (Teixeira, Silva, & Lima, 2015).

The deaf are constituted in communities, sharing the same way of communicating, habits and cultural values. Thus, they can interact in the visual-gesture modality as a channel or means of

communication. Within this context, the movement and the body and facial expressions are identified as a set of signs that constitute LIBRAS, i.e. the Brazilian Sign Language (Furtado, 2008).

Fonseca (2001) considers that “the deaf subject cannot be seen as only belonging to a linguistic minority” (p. 160 – free translation). From this fact, it is possible to ponder that the prejudice is related to generalizations towards the deaf person, characterizing them by the lack (of hearing ability), without providing them the social inclusion, due to the sensory difference. This way of assimilating deafness disregard all the other important aspects, such as family and social culture in which the deaf are inserted, which contribute to the development and the keeping of the subject’s formation.

The deafness and the family

Furtado (2008) affirms that “family is fundamental to the cognitive, emotional and social development of the deaf child” (p. 29 – free translation). The family bond must be encouraged by the teams of professionals who assist the child, in order to strengthen it.

Authors like Guarinello and Lacerda (2007) claim that the parents’ original language is the first language acquired by the child. This way, the deaf child with deaf parents is exposed to LIBRAS since early life. The acceptance of the deafness is also higher, for the parents visualize realistic expectancies from their children. On the other hand, children of hearing parents constitute a distinct family environment, with the incorporation of the sign language, not only by the deaf child, but also by all their relationships context, causing changes on the family routine and dynamics.

It should be noticed that the family learning the sign language is a movement in function of the family routine, in which that space is restructured, given the change conditions. In other words, the learning of LIBRAS by hearing parents can be a factor of more interaction with the deaf child and its lack can restrict the family communication, creating limitations in the child’s development (Karnopp, Klein, & Lazzarin, 2011; Furtado, 2008).

Method

There is a group composed of eight hearing mothers with adolescent and pre-adolescent deaf children. The group is coordinated by the psychologist of the institution. The participants have homogeneous characteristics regarding the adult age and socioeconomic conditions of medium-low class. The sample also encompasses heterogeneous characteristics, i.e., peculiarities concerning the signification of the process of their children’s deafness. The group gathers weekly for one hour and 20 minutes. The group setting is within a room in the institution itself.

The analysis body is constituted of the data collection by means of observation. In total, 10 observations were carried out, from September of 2011 to June of 2012. After that, observation reports were organized, containing reflections on the group’s movement, keeping the trustworthiness of the reality observed. The practice of reflexive notes leads to the hypothesis that are discussed in this work. After the observation period, four participations were performed in the role of coordination of the group.

The data interpretation was done by the qualitative analysis from the participants’ speeches, with the use of concepts like communication, bond, roles, resistances and transference. This way, the practices were described, connecting them to an articulated dynamic understanding.

Results and Discussion

For a better understanding, thematic axes were defined a posteriori, in accordance with the main characteristics that emerged from the group. As for the themes approached by the mothers, we have:

child's independence/autonomy; adolescence and sexuality; discovery of the deafness; and family dynamics reorganization; and topics beyond the group goal. And, as for the group process, we have: resistance; containing function of the coordinator; transference; interventions in the group field.

The family of the deaf: the group as an intervention process

The group work for hearing mothers with deaf children was articulated within a perspective of support group, trying to gather experiences in the sense of providing positive changes to the family setting with the inclusion of a deaf child. Guarinello and Lacerda (2007) explain that a group of deaf children's family members is "a space to be able to listen and to talk about their children and their problems, exchange experiences, doubts, concerns, helping on the acceptance of the deafness and showing ways for the full development of the deaf subjects and their families" (p. 109 – free translation). The deafness of a child within a home with hearing parents may cause a huge impact on the family system, influencing their affective and social relationships and the communication among the members (Guarinello, Claudio, Festa, & Paciornik, 2013). In this emphasis, other authors highlight the real necessity for the parents to interact with other families who live the in same situation to exchange experiences which can facilitate the creation of affective and communicative bonds with their children (Kelman, Silva, Amorim, Monteiro, & Azevedo, 2011).

Due to the characteristics of the group studied of providing openness for the discussion of varied themes, it can be affirmed that the group worked as a supporting factor to the mothers. Silva, Paiva and Silveira (2012) highlight the importance of caring for those mothers, offering them a space for advising and for embracing their difficulties, distress and fear. According to Mello and Burd (as cited in Kunst, Machado, & Ribeiro, 2010), the support group helps at the construction of new meanings to the complaints and feelings, facilitating the relation of the family with the impairment. The contact with other people who have been through similar situations promotes the identification and the exchange of old and current experiences. In this sense, the participants of the group felt that they were supported and understood in their difficulties. As topics with common characteristics were dealt with, the participants themselves suggested alternatives for solving conflicts.

According to experiences of other authors (Silva, Paiva, & Silveira, 2012), the group work with mothers of deaf children seems to be effective, in the sense of providing a space for reflections on education, living in group and interactions with the children, searching the development of health relationships in emotional terms. In the group space carried out in the work of the mentioned authors, the support to mothers can be realized, also re-signifying feelings and difficulties in their living. This way, the group interaction can also deal with the doubts in the relationships of the mothers with their deaf children.

Zimerman (2000) claims that the *containing function* has three aspects: reception, in which the coordinator contains the anxieties and the distress and the projecting identification of the group lying on him/her; decodification, which follows the containing of distress and encompasses an understanding of the awakening of the feeling of belonging to the group, embracing each one's necessities; and group feedback from the transformation into meanings, naming the emotional experiences in a way that the group supports them. In this sense, the coordinator of the group works in the containing function, when naming to the group the fantasies, behaviors, experiences and feelings, re-signifying the content approached. The coordinator works promoting interaction and facilitating the group process. It is not expected that the coordinator is the holder of the answers. Together with the group, reflections on the speeches occurred during the group process may be constructed.

Interconnected to the coordinator's posture, the *interventions* carried out in the group, which happened in the sense of naming feelings emergent from the group, such as sadness, anger and frustration in relation to the difficulties lived by mothers and children, should be highlighted; behaviors that were reported concerning the dealing with the children, in order to understand and be able to act in a more adapted way; and anxieties, such as the ones that happened in relation to the children's future when they become adults, once they know the limitations and the barriers existing in society, within the social relations and the access to the work world. However, in other moments, the interventions were

based upon psychoeducation, because of topics that emerged in the group field and generated doubts to the participants. As observed by Kelman et al. (2011), the theme of deafness meets difficulties to be discussed, when the problematization of the relationship mother-child arises.

Some topics generated doubts to the mothers and were dealt with during the meetings. The most frequent doubts included the topics *pre-adolescence and adolescence*; they usually caused anxiety and restlessness, especially concerning what can or cannot be expected for the age. Therefore, it could be understood that the mothers' concerns as for their child's transformations were not related to deafness itself, but worries that are more common for mothers of adolescents and which interfere with the family dynamics formalized up to then. Such doubts were articulated with the group, in a way that the issues were discussed by all the participants. The coordinator of the group, in her turn, closed the session, pointing out and reinforcing what had been discussed by the mothers. In other times, the doubts were dealt with ludic materials, for example, books with stories of adolescence or even information from articles about the age and which were discussed with the participants.

Furtado (2008, p.74 – free translation) points out that “the impairment is a hearing limitation, which does not impede the child to have *autonomy*”, but, in some moments during the group interaction, the infantilization of some aspects related to the children was noticed. Those manifestations can be exemplified by the mothers' discourse, the description of postures reinforcing the dependence of the children before daily activities in whose realization their *independence* would be expected. Some situations reported by the mothers were in relation to the difficulty allowing the child to use public transportation alone to go to school, to go to a market on the street or in the neighborhood or even to perform activities involving housework that the adolescents would be able to or to help at. In the mothers' speeches, a re-training process in relation to the children's potentialities was evident. Concerning this fact, the coordinator carried out interventions, pointing out that the lack of hearing did not impede them to do daily chores, also reinforcing that, when parents delegate responsibilities to their children, they would also arouse the feeling of being able and autonomous.

For Buscaglia (2006), the role of the family is linked to the encouragement of the children's individuality, incentivizing and allowing them to make their own choices and to express their feelings. To actualize this, “the family will have to be free from their preconceived notions in relation to dependence, to limitations and to the inferior family status in the child, allowing them to reveal their own necessities and capacities” (p. 134 – free translation). Therefore, the work of psychology is necessary for the development of autonomy and family features that facilitate an environment that promotes achievements.

Because deafness is not visible right after a child is born, the suspicion of a hearing difficulty may begin to be noticed late. In the group observed, the suspicion (followed by the diagnosis) occurred, in average, when children were between nine months and two years old. The experience report is in accordance with the hypothesis of Cortelo and Françoze (2014), in which parents have difficulties to notice their child's condition. They try to find a meaning to the child's behaviors and expect a late development of speaking acquisition. To try to prove that the child is not deaf, parents usually test children by producing sounds and vibrations, but the tests are inconclusive, and only fulfill a more comfortable reality, which is fanciful, though. Many times, the child does not have a severe hearing loss and responds to stronger and lower sounds (Silva, Pereira, & Zanolli, 2012). Nevertheless, only later they notice that the difficulty is more serious than they imagine, and only then they look for a specialist for a real diagnosis. Considering the painful moment facing the *discovery of deafness* in the child, the importance for the professional responsible for the diagnosis to handle properly with the parents' feelings should be highlighted. One of the activities in the group was the reading of an article about parents' reaction towards the diagnosis of deafness. It could be noticed that there was a group elaboration concerning this aspect, once all members shared experiences about the diagnosis and the feelings involved with that moment. Kelman et al. (2011) support the necessity of a psychoeducational focusing, not only by means of activities with informative features, but also with space for discussing the family relation involved.

The group developed not only regarding the theme deafness. Besides that, there are *themes beyond the principal goal*, which emerged because of daily experiences of each participant. The group, because of the time that it had been in operation, had a secure environment, where the relationships

established generate solid bonds. Therefore, the emergence of personal content may be a reflex of the bonding and the security that the group provides. On the other hand, daily topics brought to the group may be understood as a denial of the main group goal, acting as a hindrance. In this sense, Pichon-Rivière (2009) teaches that it is important to reduce the group ambiguity. The escape to other topics distances the group from the goal for it exists, also deviating the perspective of group evolution. Within this purpose, it was explicit in the group that there was a regression in the pre-task level, in which defenses and emerging anxiogenic phenomena occur. The escape ends up being established as the *handling of the resistance* presented.

From the assumption that in the group field there are *transference movements*, it can be understood that their result is manifested in the group especially in the relationships among the members. Transference manifestations occur among the participants, for those relate the speeches to events of their own lives, responding with the meaning of interpretations that are constitutive of themselves.

The group movement goes through the three basic assumptions approached by Bion (1975). Some moments of dependence, others of fight-flight and some seem to be on the paring assumption. The various moments lived by the group emphasize the dynamics and the transformation that are around the group processes. The dependence assumption, corroborated by Bion (1975), could be observed, from the resistance episodes presented by the group. On the other hand, in some moments, the group experienced the formation of thoughts in the search of something new, which configures the paring assumption. The formation of couples (pairs) within the group shows us that, in fact, those moments configure that paring movement. As for the fight-flight assumption, it could be observed that, before themes such as the children's independence and prejudice against deafness, the group confronts and escapes.

Interventions performed: movements and results obtained

The interventional proposal had the general aim of providing and enabling different forms of communication, besides the one already established and instituted in the group of mothers. The specific aims were: providing a continuous space for talking and for the application of knowledge in the secure environment that the group has; creating flexibilization in the group movement; and elucidating to the group the importance of communication, favoring the process of group construction and evolution and family development and improvement of communication with children.

In the first meeting coordinated by the interns, it was suggested that the mothers wrote, in cards (handed out by the coordinating intern), feelings that they had during the group experience. Those feelings could be related to issues of the support offered by the group, to the bonds established or to the fact that the group provided a space for deafness understanding. After writing the cards, the mothers should explain the feelings to the group, in a way that they were understood by the others, even if it were necessary to do mimics or signs to explain everything that the group had provided. With this activity, it was also expected to reflect on the different forms of communication, for example, the way that they communicate with their children, which is very difficult sometimes. Nevertheless, the mothers did not do the activity as it was expected. They preferred only to talk about their feelings towards the group. Besides that, it could be noticed that they looked at the psychologist while they were talking. The unexpected non-adherence to the activity may be understood as a resistance to the new coordination. It could also be noticed that the group preferred to keep its regular working, without accepting change. Zimerman and Osorio (1997) observe that the resistances are obstacles to the therapeutic process, presented as group silence, social conversation, labeling, sub-grouping, acting and transference. The difficulty to bond to the new coordination could be understood as a reflex of the group resistance, which can hinder the group development, or be presented as a healthy characteristic, demonstrating that something different is occurring. We understand that the resistance occurring in the interventional moments has paranoid features, once they were related to "fear of the emergence of something new". For example, some speeches observed were: "when will our psychologist come back?" (*sic.*) or even "our psychologist did it like this..." (*sic.*). It was also possible to observe the group

resistance in body and face expressions, for mothers kept their arms crossed, with a distant look, or staring at the exit door. The participation of the interns caused the group to unbalance, arising a feeling of insecurity due to changes in the coordination, different from what they were already used to working.

The necessity of adaptation also happened in other activities that the interns proposed, i.e., they were modified so that the group could only speak, excluding the use of other materials or other ways of expression. For example, the second activity proposed the role-playing of a situation that mothers found difficult to deal with, so, together with the other participants, they could develop a solution. The third and last activity had a psychoeducational characteristic, aiming at solving the doubts that mothers had, mainly about their children's developing phases. Those activities were also flexibilized to the regular group working, i.e., only with oral participation. However, we believe that it is a form of group relation that works and produces therapeutic benefits to all the participants. The mothers consider the secrecy of the information exchanged in that group as a positive aspect. It was very frequently commented, once the group offers a place to discuss and reflect on topics that would not be approached somewhere else. This way, the group incorporates the therapeutic function. Those considerations can also be understood from the point of view that the group transference appear regarding the expectancy and the reinforcement that the mothers find within the group.

We consider that the way that the intervention happened could provide the strengthening of positive aspects in the group, such as the group cohesion and the support that the participants offered one another. It was also possible to bring to the surface the goals for which the group was organized and the benefits that it brought to each mother's life.

Final Considerations

For developing the interlocution proposed in this experience report, we decided on a strategy to search actively for a theoretical foundation as the basis of contents related to the dynamics of deafness and the group process. From what we could analyze and interpret, we comprehend that the interventions were significant to the evolutionary process of the group. As a positive result, we present the re-signification of the group's goals, for the presence of different people in the coordination role mobilizes changes and reflections. The behavior of not adhering to proposals as they were suggested may be demonstrations of the strength that the group takes for its working, acting in its most homogeneous form, necessary for its operation and for the mothers' participation. As for the main results, we believe that, with the interventions, it was possible to strengthen positive aspects of the group, such as group cohesion and the importance that the group has in the participants' lives, for it provides reflections, learning and support for the difficulties. Besides that, the goals for which the group was organized were remembered, together with the repercussions of it in the life of each mother. In short, the main verbal interventions carried out during the coordination were open questions, directed to a member (trying to open to group exchanges), explanations and interpretations (regarding the children's dependence, sexuality in adolescence).

Studying group processes, as well as the connections involved (the institutions, the prejudice, the deafness) allows to understand psychology in a broad way and to notice its efficacy in those contexts. The results obtained after the work and its total construction were, in a general way, positive and enriching, once the group was able to re-think about important and positive aspects of its operation, such as cohesion, the possibility to have a secure place that offers support in difficulties and where they can find people to share afflictions and experiences. This way, the inclusion of interns allowed the group's maturation, as it thought about the aspects previously mentioned. With the rupture of working standards, the group is allowed to think about its own condition, its members and organization, i.e., the group can manage the anxieties that emerge from itself.

We appreciate the fact that we could carry out the activities and the interventions, for it allowed us to deepen the insertion in a working group, constructing a space that was steadily connecting to the existing process. We conclude this work affirming the importance of practical internships during the graduation in psychology, for the theoretical and practical comprehension and for the acting in distinct realities. The opportunity of working with the group was a unique experience as the practice of a psychologist in the context studied. However, we also understand the importance of continuous research towards the group thematic and also towards the vicissitudes of deafness and of the family relationships when a deaf child is born.

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