
THE CHALLENGE OF WORKING WITH TEENAGERS IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW: PSYCHODYNAMIC WORK INTERVENTION¹

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ABSTRACT. Socio-educational Reintegration Workers play a role in the custody, safety and monitoring of teenagers, complying with socio-educational measures for having infringed the law according to Brazil's Child and Teenager Statute. This study in terms of public policies has to do with education and sanction. Further, it discusses collective defense strategies from social reintegration workers, who deal on a daily basis with teenagers in conflict with the law. The methodology applied is based upon Work Psychodynamics. The study concludes that given their strong unity, social reintegration workers protect themselves from work-related pathologies given that they preserve themselves from isolation by inserting themselves in a space of intersubjective relations that support their work and keep them from fear and anxiety. Collective strength comes through cooperation built around the almost prison-like discipline shown towards teenagers deprived of their freedom. This discipline disguises a collective defense strategy that denies the fact that teenagers in conflict with the law are in a vulnerable psychosocial situation. This collective defense strategy serves under current work conditions to protect social reintegration workers from the fear of building a close relationship with teenagers given the certainty that this relationship will leave the first group at risk and unprotected.

Keywords: Attendants for Reintegration; work psychodynamics; collective defense strategy.

O DESAFIO DO TRABALHO COM ADOLESCENTES EM CONFLITO COM A LEI: INTERVENÇÃO EM PSICODINÂMICA DO TRABALHO

RESUMO. Os Atendentes de Reintegração Socioeducativa (ATRS) trabalham no acompanhamento, guarda e segurança dos adolescentes que cumprem medidas socioeducativas por terem cometido atos infracionais previstos no Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA). Trata-se de um trabalho, no âmbito das políticas públicas, que possui dimensão educativa e de sanção. Este artigo discute as estratégias coletivas de defesa desses trabalhadores, que lidam cotidianamente com adolescentes em conflito com a lei. Utilizou-se a metodologia proposta em Psicodinâmica do Trabalho. Concluiu-se que, por meio de uma forte união, esses trabalhadores protegem-se das patologias do trabalho, pois saem da posição de isolamento e se inserem em um espaço de relações intersubjetivas que sustentam o trabalho e afastam o medo e as angústias. O fortalecimento do coletivo ocorre pela mobilização da cooperação, em torno de uma disciplina quase carcerária direcionada para aos adolescentes em privação de liberdade. Uma disciplina que dissimularia uma estratégia coletiva de defesa que nega o fato de que os adolescentes em conflito com a lei estão em situação de vulnerabilidade psíquica e social. Esta estratégia coletiva de defesa possui a função, nas condições atuais de trabalho, de proteger esses sujeitos do medo de tecerem uma relação de proximidade com os esses adolescentes, baseada na certeza de que em tal relação esses trabalhadores estariam em perigo e desprotegidos.

Palavras-chave: Atendentes de reintegração; psicodinâmica do trabalho; estratégia coletiva de defesa.

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RETO DE TRABAJO CON LOS ADOLESCENTES EN CONFLICTO CON LA LEY: UNA INTERVENCIÓN EN PSICODINÁMICA DEL TRABAJO

RESUMEN. Los asistentes de Reintegración socioeducativo (ATRS) trabajan en el seguimiento, la vigilancia y la seguridad de los adolescentes que están cumpliendo medidas socioeducativas por la comisión de actos ilegales previstas en Estatuto de la Infancia y la adolescencia (ECA). Es un trabajo en el contexto de la política pública, que tiene una dimensión educativa y sanción. Este artículo analiza las estrategias colectivas de defensa de los profesionales que tratan a diario con adolescentes en conflicto con la ley. Se utilizó la metodología propuesta para la psicodinámica del trabajo. Se concluyó que, por intermedio de una unión fuerte a los trabajadores a protegerse de las condiciones de trabajo, al salir de la posición de aislamiento y se insertan en un espacio interpersonal las relaciones que apoyan el trabajo y lejos del miedo y la angustia. El fortalecimiento del colectivo es la movilización de la cooperación en torno a una disciplina de la prisión casi dirigido a adolescentes de privación de libertad. Una disciplina que ocultaría una estrategia de defensa colectiva que niega el hecho de que los adolescentes en conflicto con la ley están en situación de vulnerabilidad psicológica y social. Esta estrategia colectiva de defensa tiene la función, las condiciones actuales de trabajo, para proteger a estos temas desde el miedo trenzó una estrecha relación con estos adolescentes, basado en la certeza de que a este respecto que estaban en peligro y sin protección.

Palabras-clave: Asistentes de reintegración; psicodinámica del trabajo; estrategia de defensa colectiva.

Introduction

The work of Socio-educational Reintegration workers (SRW) with teenagers facing legal complication bears subjective impact, given the work leaves these workers take due to health issues, because of ill slept nights and fear of being recognized on the street by teenagers who have fled the premises. In this sense, this study is a tentative proposal of investigating subjective repercussion of this job and, thus, to understand how these professionals deal with the challenge of working with teenagers in trouble with the law and the way this job moves them from a subjective viewpoint, as well as the challenges SRWs need to overcome to endure anguishes and the fear in the job, so they do not fall ill or succumb as victims of violence.

The work of SRW is references at the National System of Socio-educational Attendance (*Sinase*, Portuguese acronym) and is characterized as activities of follow-up, guard and security of teenagers who are attending to socio-educational measures for having committed infractions, as foreseen by the Statute of the Child and Teenagers (ECA, Portuguese acronym, lei n. 8069/1990).

National guidelines about the social reinsertion of these teenagers is in accordance with the Doctrine of Full Protection from ECA, according to which children and teenagers must have their rights protected and respected in full, since they are characterized as individuals in development. Thus, in the case of a teenager coming to commit an infraction, ECA foresees socio-educational measures such as partial freedom, assisted freedom, or commitment to an institution. According to ECA (article #103), infraction is the individual's conduct that may be described as a crime or penal contravention. ECA foresees from more mildly socio-educational measures, such as warnings, community service, to more severe ones, such as partial freedom, assisted freedom and commitment to an institution (Lei n. 8096/1990).

The research reported here investigated the work of SRWs in a socio-educational commitment institution, which are institutions that shelter teenagers who have had their freedom taken away because they have committed infractions. These institutions must provide these teenagers with security, and also make available educational and health related interventions, as well as social and familiar counseling.

The institution investigated here is specialized in multi-professional counseling of boys between the ages of 12 and 21. The goal of these institutions is, according to the Secretary of the Child and the Teenager, to stimulate significant social changes in the lives of these individuals.

In this context, SRWs form an interdisciplinary team composed of psychologists, social workers, teachers, and others. Their work acts on the level of public policies regarding two matters, educational and sanctioning, because, while they bring the responsibility to the individual, they stimulate educational actions (Araújo, 2012).

Socio-educational work is fundamental in the context of full protection, with respect to the intervention with teenagers in trouble with the law. SRWs have a double function, on the one side, they need to execute practices related to education, and, on the other, are compelled to perform interventions with respect to safety and vigilance. The measure of freedom privacy, given its proximity to the incarceration system, leads these workers to deal with these two sides, not always concealable: ensure safety in the unity and impose socio-educational measures (Herculano & Gonçalves, 2011). In this scenario, we understand that these professionals are impacted by their work, since it demands contradictory tasks, which put them in a position of ambiguity with intangible subjective repercussions.

The contradictions presented in this job, such as the lack of support and formation for its execution, give these professionals a privileged position of controlling these teenagers, in order to maintain a minimal level of proximity (Amorim & Paes, 2012). Thus, the task of controlling and disciplining these teenagers is strengthened with respect to socio-educational measures, given fear and discredited feelings in the socio-educational system and, based on previous experience that teenager will behave violently and will not submit to the institutional norms (Cella & Camargo, 2009). In this context, these agents have to deal with some of the hindrances of the real job, such as controlling violence of these teenagers, and their own violence, moved by the fear of being attacked by these teenagers.

The contributions Work Psychodynamics to understand subjective challenges of the job

Work Psychodynamics provides elements for a better understanding of the way in which work mobilizes subjects, generating suffering, but also enabling personal transformation that can be a source of pleasure and suffering for the subject, since working is transforming oneself (Dejours & Mello Neto, 2012). Work Psychodynamics is a clinic discipline occupied with describing, knowing and intervening in the relationship between work and mental health, and it is a theoretical discipline subject-oriented, finding support in psychoanalysis and social theory (Dejours, 2013).

Gernet (2008) reminds that working is not about only a means to produce material goods or service, but also about transforming the subject. The author claims that the Freudian notion of "Arbeit" comprises different ascriptions (Traumarbeit, Trauerarbeit, Kulturarbeit, Durcharbeiten), which evoke the relationship between the sexual dimension and the psychic dimension, as is the case of dream work and grief work. All these ascriptions that frame working contain the idea of "work demands" (Arbeitsanforderung), which would be the result of the Self and its drive (Dejours & Mello Neto, 2012).

In Freudian discourse, the destiny of the drive is the destiny of the regulation of its force by symbolic order, indicating the entrance of the drive in the field of representation (*vorstellung*), so that a drive with its unorganized potency promotes a demands on psychic work, this demand of drive regulation imposes on the subject's relationship with the world. Working, in the Freudian sense of work demands, differs from working production in the sense of poesis, which is the production of an acting subject in the world whose goal is to transform it. It must be emphasized that transforming the world implies the engagement of subjectivity that could be revealed by the impasse of meeting with the real work, which puts the subject facing the experience of failure, as an affective and enigmatic experience that works as a message that requires from the subject a translation.

It is in working that the subject mobilizes their intelligence to come up with or add something to their selves in order to fulfill a gap between a task (the prescribed) and the activity (the effective). Facing real demands from work, the subject is compelled to use their abilities they did not have before, but had to

build what gives their work the dimension of production – poiesis, but that the demand also engages in subjectivity (Dejours & Mello Neto, 2012). Worker is confronted with resistance from reality, which will thrust them to think and act differently from what was foreseen by the organization of work. (Dejours, 2013). In this sense, working would be, first of all, failing before the real world of work, since the gap between the prescribed and the activity could not be foreseen, this puts the subject in the position of having to reinvent themselves. Therefore, on work, according to segundo Gernet e Dejours (2011), the subject gets in touch with perplexity, fear, doubt, distress, and pleasure, since the contact with work is achieved effectively by suffering.

Suffering is considered to be starting point of the world of work, because real work is revealed to the subject by the *phatic* mode, as an experience imposed on subjectivity, as passive suffering that brings into existence a range of feelings, such as surprise, irritation, anger, discouragement, among others (Dejours, 2013). However, this suffering must be overcome and transformed into a solution, since it is by the subject's capacity of finding solutions that new paths can be traced and obstacles can be overcome.

Dejours (2013) insists that working is not an isolated activity, because, in order to overcome obstacles, the worker need to count with the collaboration with other workers, what brings us to the dimension of the collective and its function on work. In this perspective, this study privileges the collective dimension aiming to understand how SRWs face work challenges by using strategies of collective defense. Collective work can mobilize abilities of cooperation, in which individual and collective defenses are concealed so workers can endure through work anguish. With respect to defensive strategies, the strengthening of the collective dimension allows the group to face difficulties in search of psychic balance (Lancman & Uchida, 2003). Thus, the feeling of belonging to the collective of work is extremely important for mental health.

Work Psychodynamics addresses the fact the subject is not passively submitted to the suffering of impositions of work organization, so that when workers are not able to transform this feeling creatively by sublimation in work they defend. Defensive strategies are mechanisms used by workers as a way of rationalizing distress, fear, insecurity that cause work-related pain. These defenses mechanisms, based on the impossibility of overcome rigid organizational prescription, are used by workers minimizing the perception of pressure that causes suffering,

However, when these defense strategies are insufficient or when there is lack of institutional support for creative investment in work environment what that dominion is imposed on relations, workers feels their mental health is threatened. Collective strategies of defense do not change the goal risk nor do they transform suffering in work in pleasure, but they are related to the effort of all in protection against suffering and the destabilizing work effects (Dejours, 2013).

Method

The current research is of qualitative nature and was conducted between March 2013 and February 2014 in a unit of commitment for teenagers with problems with the law in Brasília, Brazil. Were part of this study 10 Socio-educational Reintegration Workers (SRWs).

The research was initially designed for the teenagers, however with the insertion of the researchers of the institution was requested by the board, a demand of work with SRWs looking at the sufferings caused by the job of these professionals identified by the board (conflicts, medical leaves, diagnoses of depression, among others).

We understand that the formulation of a demand for intervention in Work Psychodynamics, even if being formulated by the direction board, needed to be confirmed by the SRWs. In this sense, the researchers sought to understand subjective challenges of organization of work with teenagers in conflict with the law from the viewpoint of Work Psychodynamics.

It should be noted that, in its theoretical dimensions, Work Psychodynamics (WP) investigates subjective aspects mobilized in the organization and the relations of work that can generate both pleasure and suffering at work.

In order to understand the subjective repercussion of work, WP uses as method that of clinical investigation of work, characterized by the researcher listening to situations that involve working aiming at promoting by a collective space of talking a relationship among mental health and work and inserting as mediator between psychic economy and social field (Heloani & Lancman, 2004; Lhuillier, 2006).

Work clinic provides a space for a collective exchange among workers focusing on the work that allow for investigations and interventions in some elements, such as cooperation, recognition, suffering, intelligence mobilization, and also defensive strategies that develop and are established in work situation (Heloani & Lancman, 2004). In this sense, researchers proposed to SRWs a WP intervention following 6 steps.

Step 1 – pre inquiries: the design of the investigation was based on two essential presuppositions; the voluntaries and the acknowledgement of the institution to the conduction of the pre inquiries that were formed of steps of discussion in collective, in a total of 10 meetings. SRWs work in shifts of 24 hours and have a leave of 72 hours. A criterion of inclusion in the research was the group of staff with the greatest number of volunteers available for data collection.

This first step of the pre inquiries happened in 5 meetings, with 5 different teams. These meetings aimed at raising the greatest number of volunteers and at offering a space to listen to their demands.

Step 2 – the inquiries: they took place during 5 meetings, in which there were a repositioning of the demands and a deepening of the problems. Meeting lasted for about an hour and a half and took place in a space given inside the institution.

Step 3 - analysis of the inquiries: it had the scope over the material produced in the collective spaces of talking. In this space, it was possible for workers to express their subjective experiences with respect to work with teenagers.

Step 4 – clinical observation: movements that happened between workers and researchers were retrieved in order to articulate with commentaries in which session to facilitate the comprehension with respect to the group's specific dynamics.

Step 5 – interpretation: in this phase, guided by the analysis of the demand, the material of the inquiries and clinical observation, the researchers aimed at making sense the subjective elements that emerged during these sessions.

Step 6 – the return and validation of the report. In this step, the material produced in the collective space was presented to the participants in the form of a report, thus workers were able to analyze its content, and also to react and suggest modifications and inclusions. So that the final report embraced modifications presented by the workers. Thus, this step aimed at the re-appropriation of the research material by the workers (Heloani & Lancman, 2004).

During the data collection period, researchers paid attention to contexts expressed by the group that showed contractions, agreements, not expressed, and movements of resistance and of defense. In this sense, researchers were implicated in the listening process, in the observation and in the systematization of ideas built in the group (Lancman & Uchida, 2003; Lancman & Jardim, 2004).

The practice in WP is not aimed at modifying the work in itself, but the social relations in the work environment and their meanings. Work Psychodynamics research is a process of action clothed in transformation character, with the goal at systematizing discussions raised up in groups. These discussions about the centrality of the work and their importance to the subjects are of paramount importance, considering the emancipation of a group in an intersubjective perspective (Sznclwar, Uchida, & Lancman, 2011).

Rolo (2013) reminds us that Work Psychodynamics has to do with the possibility of social change supported by the idea of subversion (subverting the prescription, subverting social and biological orders). In this sense, work psychodynamics proposes a new conception of emancipation that starts with work experience. This emancipation has to do with a form of collective intelligence able to conjugate different viewpoints. Thus, the collective of workers would not be a sum of individual

intelligences, but a space of promotion of collective intelligence, that could be called cooperation (Dejours, Abdoucheli, & Jayet 1994). In this perspective, the work is inserted as a transforming action of the world. This means that workers are implicated in discussing collectively opinions of everyone to reach a shared decision, and it is in this space of cooperation that collective intelligence is built, thus reaching the matter of emancipation.

Results and discussion

The analysis of clinical intervention of work identified the problems of this job that makes SRWs face violence and destructiveness of teenagers, but also their own violence. Clinical work indicates, according to Dejours and Mello Neto (2012), work as the motor of social laces, so that in this space of talking and of strengthening social laces, rules and settlements intend to associate the risks of violence and to contribute to a better understanding of the Self of the real mediated by work (Dejours, 2006). This in this space of talking, problems related to work were shared, these show the relationship between the pathology and work organization, but also between subject and social lace: “[They] tried to set fire to kill themselves. But we are firemen”, another worker intervened: “Here you have to contain teenagers without hurting them. I have a hard time trying to restrain the kid without hurting him”. Unexpected situation need to be rapidly tamed, otherwise there is the risk of these workers feeling vulnerable. In this context, the sovereignty of fear is characterized as a strategy to face suffering related to work and to the teenagers, as can be seen in the following report: “... we are not afraid of working here, if we were we would not be here. Everything here is dangerous. The strategy is we can't be afraid”.

Molinier (2013) argues that these collective defense strategies are fragile and that in order to be efficient it is necessary the adherence of the entire group. Thus, the struggle against fear among these defensive strategies implies acting before it is manifested.

The fear of working shows what is experienced subjectively by workers and could paralyze these professionals. With respect to the fears of teenagers, the discussion started with the following deposition among the SRWs:

Here is tension; there are 100 patients for 5 agents. If there is fight we cannot handle them. If there is fear, the person cannot work here, the person can't even be afraid of being physically assaulted, since the boy could want to do with us what he used to do on the streets. However, this does not frighten us.

The speech transcribed above shows fear among these professionals. In this scenario, in order to avoid the installation of fear, these workers use cooperation supported in mutual trust relations that are organized around a incarceration-like discipline to deal with suffering and not to succumb to violence and fear, as has been reported: “... if the interns start to realize there will be discipline, they minimize actions”, and “... if discipline is taken away, they (the teenagers) will take over the premises”. So that this work imposes paradoxes to these subjects, they have to perform both the reprehensive and educational activities.

In this context, discipline has punitive value, since it allows for workers to dominate and contain teenagers' violent acts that could compromise their work, as has been reported:

There has to be discipline; otherwise someone dominates and the other is dominated. We need to impose ourselves; otherwise it is the same thing from the streets. It is not violence, it is discipline, and it is not punishment. Here everything is restricted. We are talking about teenagers. We have to say: lad, I'm taking off your videogame... we are accused of being too violent.

In this sense, discipline is a strategy of cooperation facing dangers and fears of the teenagers, thus, through discipline these workers feel more powerful with respect to the teens, allowing them to live in the same institutional space with the teens.

In this context, discipline mobilizes the group to fight collectively against the fear of these teenagers, as they have asserted: "... Nowadays things are not 100%, but it is good with respect to the discipline we impose. Even though we have lack of support, we do everything we can".

For the SRWs, the discipline in the unity is a means to soften up these teenagers so they can receive the rules and orders from the institution. This discipline dissimulates a collective defense strategy that denies the fact that these teenagers are in a situation of social and psychic vulnerability, as can be exemplified in the following excerpt: "... at the same time in which they are vulnerable, they are victims and criminals, and the State does not care", and "... socio-educational systems begins where all others have failed: parents, family, society".

This collective defense strategy functions, in work conditions, as a way to protect subjects so that they have a more close relationship with teenagers based on the certainty that, in this relationship, they would be in danger and unprotected, as can be seen in the following report: "... I work at Hell. In order to stay here it is necessary recovery. I count the minutes to leave here. I will tell that I've worked at a place where I never saw a positive result".

Exchanges in the space of talking as shown in the reports display suffering at work. Dejours et al. (1994) defend that the manifestations of suffering from workers enables the access to a part of the job that not always is revealed. This is an important point for Work Psychodynamics, because it is via the elaboration of suffering in collective spaces that workers can transform their experience with work and recognize how violence comes into play to soften up the impact of conflicting elements that could unleash suffering, as has been mentioned in: "When I am stressed out, and need to go out to cool off, it is in these times the team comes in taking care of my module while I go out to chill off". Collective strengthening allows these workers to face difficulties and to search for psychic balance (Lancman & Uchida, 2003). Collective work, in the exchange of experience enables a construction of rules for a common work, given that rules of work built collectively are ways of living in collectivity and contribute to the continuance of the work (Dejours & Delory-Momberger, 2010).

Final considerations

This work brought forth discussions on the challenges of socio-educational work with teenagers facing legal problems, since it enabled participants to listen to themselves in their real contradictions with the institution, with the socio-educational measures and with teenagers. It was about creating a collective space for replacing work at the center and discussing it. These encounters showed collective strategies of defense and were formed a resource that reiterates the individuals of position of isolation and proposes that they need to be together, not only to defend themselves, but also to explicate their contradictions, distresses and look for new paths for facing troubles at work.

What is more, in this space not only problems were shared but also solutions. Solidarity and union were identified, they strengthened individual strategies and the recognized the value of cooperative work, but also its risks.

The delivery of the report, at the end of the research, allowed SRWs to identify contradictory points that cause suffering in work. And, according to these workers, it will aid the development a course of formation that shelters difficulties and challenges in working with teenagers. However, it is important to consider that these formations need to go beyond legal aspects related to *Sinase*, and enabling the promotion of collective space to minimize the risk of psychic instability in work.

The analyses of the workers' experiences of social reintegration alongside the teenagers in conflict with the law led to an understanding of the collective defense strategies employed by these professionals that deal with violence daily.

These strategies also display an adaptive value with respect to suffering in work, since it allows these workers are protected, but at the same time hinders their contact with difficulties that they face to build an intersubjective relation with the teens and that seem indispensable for an intervention that is intended to be socio-educational.

In this context of work, in which proximity with teenagers is threatening, these workers cannot reflect with other professionals about these matters, nor about the need to transform their work organization, which is so necessary for an effective improvement in the conditions of work of these professionals and in the construction of a more effectively socio-educational system.

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