

Investigation into the Condition of Shelters in Rio de Janeiro (2003)

This study was carried out to investigate the institutions in the municipality of Rio that are attended by children and adolescents under 12 years of age. The data was collected during the period from March to June 2003. Such a project has the intention of reorganizing the homes and contributing to the improvement of care of children and adolescents, in a situation of risk. The NGOs Brazilian Association Terra dos Homens (ABTH) and Exola were chosen to carry it out.

THE SCOPE of the INQUIRY

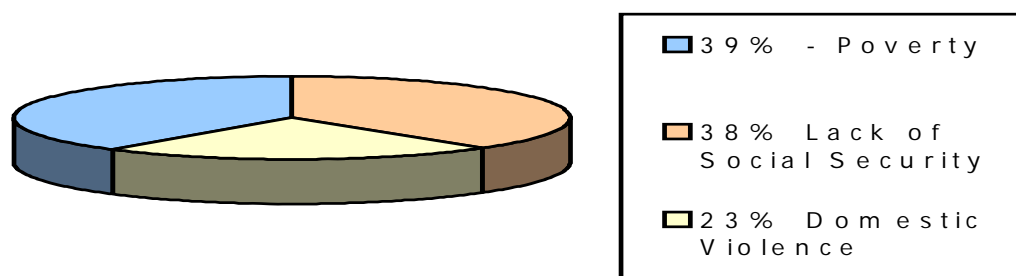
69 homes that care for children and adolescents from 0 to 11 years were investigated in the study. In the homes studied, there proved to be a total of 1,983 children and adolescents.

REASONS FOR BEING TAKEN INTO CARE

Of the total of 1,983 children and adolescents, 39% are institutionalised, 39% due to their family's lack of resources. These means that the state of poverty that these families face many times brings them to leave there children in institutions. As in the place where they live there often is not a good network of services, they leave there children in care, where they end up remaining permanently.

The lack of social security in relation to employment and a network of services that assists family disaggregation (generating problems that causes the departure of the children and teenagers for the street) is responsible for the institutionalisation of 38% of children and adolescents.

Domestic violence is responsible for 23% of the cases of institutionalisation. This includes cases of physical and psychological violence against the child, as well as negligence, or sexual abuse and exploitation. An effective alternative to institutionalisation are projects of family protection that strive for family reintegration, avoiding the institutionalisation of the child.

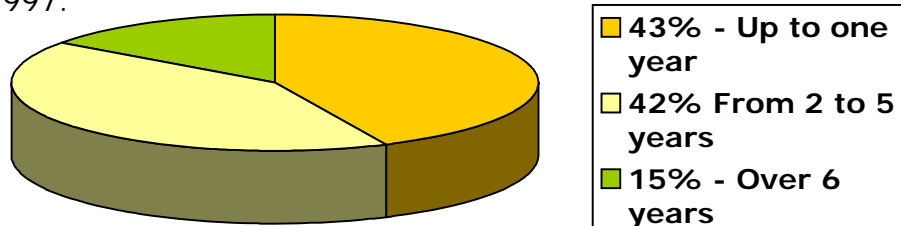


LENGTH OF CARE

42% of the children and adolescents in care have lived in the institutions for a time that varies between 2 and 5 years. This reports a percentage that is very high and disagrees with the ECA, Estatuto da Criança e do adolescente (Child and Adolescent Act, Federal Law no. 8069/90), which considers institutionalisation a transitory measure. The confinement in homes for a long time and from very early gives rise to various impairments to these children and adolescents.

The 15% of children and adolescents that have been in care for over 6 years represent the most vulnerable contingent to the process of institutionalization. These cases are generally those that present the greatest difficulty in achieving autonomy.

However, today we can identify a better picture than that presented before the implementation of the ECA (Child and Adolescent Act). The fact that 43% of the children and adolescents in care have been in the institutions for less than one year is an advancement. This can be explained by the gradual implementation of the ECA and for the politics deliberated by the CMDCA, Conselho Municipal dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente (Municipal Council of the Rights of Children and Adolescents) like for example the Family Protection Project (projeto Família Acolhedor), created by the Council in 1997.

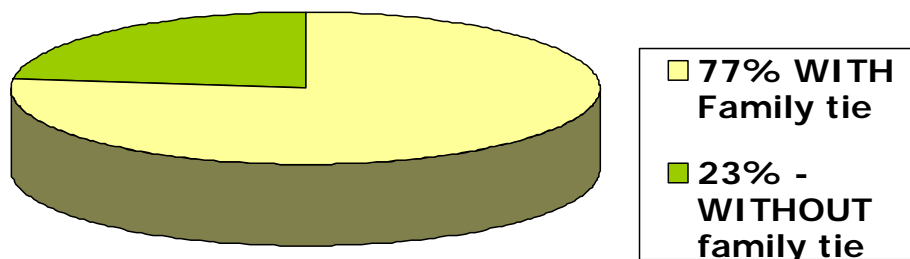


THE CONDITION OF THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

About 77% of the children and adolescents in care have family relationships, which shows a lack of investment in family reintegration. The work of family reintegration of the children and adolescents in care is predicted in the ECA (Child and Adolescent Act), that also determines that the institutions should have professionals trained in this field. However, the study shows that some homes still do not have technical team. We assert that the capability of the professionals is fundamental in work with institutionalized children and adolescents and their families.

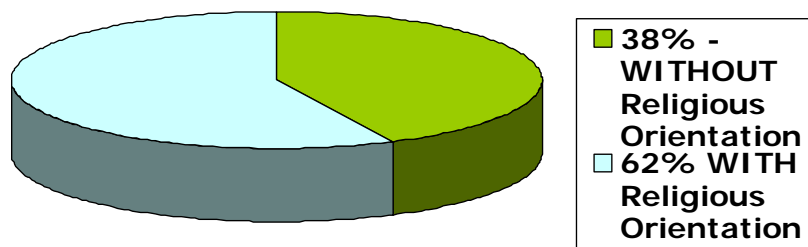
The situation of the children and teenagers that do not have a family tie, that is they are visited by a relative once a year or even never, that have a missing family or that do not have family, is the most vulnerable, representing 23% of cases.

In these cases once more the presence of a qualified technical team is important. It is these professionals that should assess if the lack of these family ties does or does not justify the loss of the family's control, the only condition that makes the child available for adoption, giving them the opportunity to live in a family.



RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

62% of the homes studied have religious orientation, that is, Catholic, Evangelical or Espiritual. This has a historical origin, as social care started in Brazil, during colonial times, through the Catholic Church. Even after the separation of the Church and the State, this work continued to be in large parte linked to religion.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE INSTITUTIONS

26% of the homes investigated are maintained by personal donations by individuals. This reveals that part of the population believes that the institutions are a solution for the problems of children and adolescents that are found in a situation of risk indicating a devalorization of the work of family reintegration. It is necessary to make known that other forms of participation in the society exist.

35% of the homes studied are funded by the municipal and state governments and 39% by the federal government. This reveals that the social security services that maintain these homes should stimulate the improvement of care for children and adolescents and of the ECA.

