



Los efectos de la separación familiar en niñas y adolescentes del Centro de Acogimiento Dorotea Carrión de la ciudad de Loja

The effects of family separation on girls and adolescents from the Dorotea Carrión

Accommodation Center in the city of Loja

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Resumen

A nivel mundial, se reportan más de 80.000 casos de abuso sexual infantil al año, aunque se estima que las cifras reales son significativamente mayores debido a la falta de denuncia. En Ecuador, el acogimiento institucional es una medida transitoria de protección, que busca salvaguardar a niños, niñas y adolescentes que se encuentren en riesgo dispuesta por la autoridad judicial, en casos que el acogimiento familiar no sea posible y en los que se hayan agotado todas las medidas previas que establece el Código de Niñez y Adolescencia. El presente estudio analizó los efectos que genera la separación familiar en niñas y adolescentes del Centro de Acogimiento Dorotea Carrión de la ciudad de Loja, fundamentar teóricamente los efectos que genera la separación familiar de las niñas y adolescentes, identificar las causas, efectos e implementar un plan de intervención social individual a fin de reinsertar a las niñas y adolescentes a su grupo familiar, se utilizó la metodología con enfoque cualitativo a través de la aplicación de una entrevista semiestructurada a la totalidad de las niñas y adolescente alojadas en el centro, para contextualizar sus percepciones y experiencias, se complementó con la técnica de grupos focales y observación, lo expuesto permite arribar a las siguientes conclusiones la institucionalización afecta en la vida cotidiana de las niñas y adolescentes, generando apego inseguro, alteraciones familiares, esta medida de protección debe ser excepcional y último recurso por el menor tiempo posible, sin embargo los retrasos judiciales prolongan su permanencia y dificultan el retorno de las niñas y adolescentes a los hogares.

Palabras clave: acogimiento institucional; familia; reinsertión familiar; medida de protección; separación familiar

Abstract

Globally, more than 80,000 cases of child sexual abuse are reported each year, although the actual numbers are estimated to be significantly higher due to underreporting. In Ecuador, institutional care is a temporary protection measure, which seeks to safeguard children and adolescents who are at risk as ordered by the judicial authority, in cases where family care is not possible and in which all prior measures established by the Code of Children and Adolescence have been exhausted. The present study analyzed the effects generated by family separation in girls and adolescents at the Dorotea Carrión Shelter Center in the city of Loja, theoretically substantiating the effects generated by family separation of girls and adolescents, identifying the causes, effects and implementing an individual social intervention plan in order to reintegrate the girls and adolescents into their family group. The methodology with a qualitative approach was used through the application of a semi-structured interview to all the girls and adolescents housed in the center, to contextualize their perceptions, and experiences, was complemented with the technique of focus groups and observation, the above allows us to reach the following conclusions: institutionalization affects the daily life of girls and adolescents, generating insecure attachment, family alterations, this protection measure must be exceptional and a last resort for the shortest possible time, however judicial delays prolong their stay and make it difficult for girls and adolescents to return to their homes.

Keywords: institutional care; family; family reintegration; protective measure; family separation



Introducción

Institutional care is defined as a temporary or emergent protection measure, exceptional, in cases where family care is not possible and in those where all the previous measures established by the Child and Adolescent Code, provided by the competent judicial authority, have been exhausted, for those girls, boys and adolescents deprived of their family environment who are outside their country of habitual residence or are victims of emergency situations, those who will be designated as unaccompanied or separated (Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, 2023)

Sexual abuse according to the concept of sexual abuse contained in Art. 68 of the Child and Adolescent Code (2003) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Penal Code on the matter, for the purposes of this Code, any physical contact, suggestion of a sexual nature, to which a child is subjected, even with their apparent consent, through seduction, blackmail, intimidation, deception, threats, or any other means constitutes sexual abuse.

Methods

The study was framed in the positivist paradigm, from which rights-based Social Work professional accompaniment and migrant social inclusion were approached as observable and measurable phenomena suitable for statistical analysis (Beltrán & Bernal, 2020). A quantitative approach and a non-experimental, correlational, cross-sectional design were adopted; aimed at identifying the relationship between both variables without intentional manipulation (Arias et al., 2022; Lim, 2025).

Child abuse is considered a public health problem due to the high rates it has reached and the damage it produces in the short and long term. This psychosocial phenomenon affects girls, boys and adolescents. The Child and Adolescent Code (2003), indicates that maltreatment, such as: "any conduct, action or omission, that causes or may cause damage



to the physical, psychological or sexual integrity or health of a child, girl or adolescent, by any person, including their parents, educators and persons in charge of their care" (Art.67)

Sexual exploitation according to the Code of Childhood and Adolescence (2003), mentions that sexual exploitation: "prostitution and child pornography constitute sexual exploitation.

Child prostitution is the use of a boy, girl or adolescent in sexual activities in exchange for remuneration or any other retribution" (Art. 69).

The present investigation is of social interest since it is directly related to the problems of society and academic due to the fact that the information is relevant for future investigations, which allows the social work professional to intervene individually and collectively within the public and private sector. Within the line of research social, legal and behavioral studies; contribute to the solution of social, legal and behavioral problems that hinder sustainable and integral development and harmonious relations between members of the population, with the aim of seeking a more inclusive, integral and humanistic human development, in accordance with the principles and values promoted by the Universidad Nacional de Loja.

Since the family is the fundamental nucleus of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should be directed above all to ensure that the child remains or returns to be under the care of his parents or, when appropriate, of other close family members, children and adolescents must feel protected and cared for and that they promote all their potential. Children who are totally or partially deprived of parental care are in a special situation of risk of being deprived of the upbringing that that environment gives them (Naciones Unidas, 2010).

Deepening the information from a familiar perspective is of academic interest that allows providing current descriptive data on this problem. In the professional field as a Social Worker, the interest is framed by providing the community with a detailed study of the situations of vulnerability that affect families in the community. It has a legal impact since interdisciplinary work is necessary for the resolution of cases, as well as knowledge of current regulations. The researcher knows the reality of the place where the investigation is carried out, as well as the expertise sufficient to gather information at the Dorotea Carrión Reception Center.

The effects that the institutional reception produces involves the affective part linked to communication and is vitally important in the development of the child, however there is a deterioration in the affective communication which causes changes in the behavior that over time determines a lack of appreciation towards the image that claimed to be important for the child, isolation between its members, distancing in family relationships, lack of affection for the caregivers when living with other figures other than the parents, emotions of uprooting, loss of the group of friends of the sector where they lived and the changes in the educational institution.

The lack of communication, which is constituted by the disinterest they have between them, of not demonstrating family support that provides security and trust, especially from the fathers towards the children, so that they can obtain a good development of their personality before the events that they are immersed in life, this family does not have the opportunity to express an effective communication, as a fundamental tool for the solution of problems.

The lack of support between the members of the home causes an emotional separation in adolescent girls, hindering the development of their creativity both in the educational part and in the progress of their life (Villavicencio y Villarroel, 2017)

Context

The results allowed for an analysis of the effects of family separation on girls and adolescents at the Dorotea Carrión Shelter in the city of Loja. This was achieved through the recognition of multiple realities and extremely important facts from the sources investigated. The results are highly dependent on emotions and exhaustive analyses of the content of the information sources.

Population, sample and criteria

All girls and adolescents in institutional care have a protection measure, either judicial or administrative, under the resolution of the competent authorities. On the one hand, 8 girls and adolescents have been in institutional care for more than a year, 6 girls and adolescents have been there for 1 to 3 months, and 6 girls and adolescents for 4 to 6 months.

Instrument

The approach of this research is qualitative, which allowed for a wide range of research possibilities through the combination of various techniques. Qualitative research requires the recognition of multiple realities and seeks to capture the perspective of the subject or sources being investigated. The results are highly dependent on emotions or exhaustive analyses of the content of the information sources.

The scientific method allowed for the acquisition of knowledge that can be considered valid from a scientific point of view. According to Blácido et al. (2022), "the scientific method allows us to arrive at knowledge and is used in different fields of science where scientists have different questions in their areas of research" (p. 1). Regarding the inductive method, it allowed for the acquisition of information from experience to abstract ideas; that is, the abstract idea is the conceptualization, while experience refers to the lived experiences or the individual's perception of reality. Palmett (2020) points out the following: The inductive method is part of the scientific method because it has stages that

consolidate the research process by obtaining the conclusions of the study carried out. These stages are: observation, data collection, and verification. In this way, these methods allow establishing a link between theory and research. This means that, in the scientific research process, it is relevant to decide which methodology will be used; if the methodology and reasoning have been correctly directed and are closely related, the next step will be to present the fact and analyze the causes and effects of the object of study in order to facilitate a scientific explanation. (p. 38)

Through the deductive method, I enable the explanation of the components of a theory, which leads to a specific hypothesis. Palmer (2020) states that the deductive method is one in which the learning process moves from the most general to the most specific. The deductive approach is based on the idea that if a relationship or causal relationship seems to be implicit in a theory or particular case, it may be true in many cases. Deductive methods attempt to prove whether such a connection occurs in more general situations.

Observation, in research techniques, allowed researchers to observe the case, gather information, and record it for subsequent analysis. This element is fundamental, as the researcher relies on it to obtain the greatest amount of data. According to Torres et al. (2019), observation has the disadvantage of not being a fast method, so data collection takes a certain amount of time, since the object of study must be considered in all phases to obtain information according to the stimulus (p. 7).

The interview facilitated data collection in qualitative research. It is defined as a conversation whose purpose is the informal discussion of the facts. According to Torres et al. (2019), the commonly used data collection methods for obtaining data through sample surveys are personal interviews and telephone interviews. With these methods, properly trained interviewers, and planned follow-up interviews, response rates of over 60% to 75% are typically achieved.

The focus group technique allows for the collection of qualitative information in a group setting by capturing the expressions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences of girls and adolescents in a specific context. This alternative is valid and widely used as a qualitative data collection instrument in various fields of knowledge in recent decades due to the time efficiency of working in a group session. (Rodas & Pacheco, 2020) The focus group technique has been used by researchers in the social and behavioral sciences for over eighty years. However, due to the wide range of information regarding focus groups, a clear guide for implementing this technique in the social sciences was deemed necessary (p. 1).

Through the technique of observation, data was collected clearly and objectively from the investigated reality. This involved grouping the data, addressing the variables and elements of the problem, and clearly defining the objectives and object of study. This process resulted in summaries that facilitated interpretation and the recording of observations through the connection of theory with reality, thus contributing to a better understanding of the object of study

According to interviews conducted with the girls and adolescents at the Shelter, they stated that they are in institutional care due to various factors characterized by a diversity of psychological, emotional, cultural, social, power dynamics, and gender-related processes during a crucial period of their lives. This has led to their separation from their families and the disruption of their habits, customs, and social circles.

Table 1. *Protective measure*

Category		Subcategory	Find	Amount
Legal	Status and	Protective measure	All of them have a protection measure (judicial or administrative).	20 NNA
	Length of Stay			



Category	Subcategory	Find	Amount
Emotional Effects of Separation	Negative Emotional Impact	They feel sadness, stress, crying, irritability, and difficulty adapting.	18 NNA
	Positive Perception	They feel good and better cared for than in their own homes (orphans, family did not take responsibility).	2 teenagers

Category	Subcategory	Find	Amount
Services and attention received	Basic Care	They receive food (5 times/day) and clothing.	20 NNA
	Psychosocial Support	They receive psychological support, social work services, and family support.	20 NNA
	Health Care	They receive medical and dental care.	20 NNA

Category	Subcategory	Find	Amount
Desire for Family Reunification	Willingness to Return	They express their desire to return to their family	13 NNA
	Perception of Impossibility	They believe that returning is not possible due to the complexity of	7 NNA

their cases (tax investigation).

Category	Subcategory	Find	Amount
Perceptions and Learning	Estrangement	They miss their familiar environment, customs, and food from their territory.	7 NNA
	Adaptation	At first, they found it difficult to adapt to the rules, habits, and routines of the center..	Mostly from coastal provinces
	Positive aspects	They acquired tools to undertake projects and generate resources (mentioned by 15-year-old adolescents).	Mostly from coastal provinces. Some teenagers over 15 years old.

Category	Subcategory	Find	Amount
Petitions to the Authorities	Applications	To expedite and complete the investigations of their processes.	Expressed in the group dialogue 7 NNA
		Clarify your personal, social, family and legal situation.	
		To be able to leave the center and reunite with their families.	

Source: Own creation



Expert Validation

Through the deductive method, I enable the explanation of the components of a theory itself, leading to a specific hypothesis. Palmero (2020) defines the deductive method as one in which the learning process moves from the general to the specific. The deductive approach is based on the idea that if a relationship or causal link appears to be implicit in a theory or particular case, it may be true in many cases. Deductive methods attempt to test whether such a relationship or connection occurs in more general situations.

Observation, in research techniques, allowed for the observation of the case, the collection of information, and its recording for subsequent analysis. This element is fundamental, since the researcher relies on it to obtain the greatest amount of data. According to Torres et al. (2019), observation has the disadvantage of not being a fast method, so obtaining data takes a certain amount of time, as the object of study must be considered in all phases to obtain information according to the stimulus produced (p. 7).

Pilot test

The interview facilitated data collection in qualitative research. It is defined as a conversation whose purpose is a colloquial dialogue about the facts. According to Torres et al. (2019), the most commonly used data collection methods for sample surveys are personal interviews and telephone interviews. With these methods, properly trained interviewers, and planned follow-up interviews, response rates of over 60% and 75% are typically achieved.

The focus group technique allowed for the collection of qualitative information in a group setting by capturing the expressions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences of girls and adolescents in a specific context. This alternative is valid and widely used as a qualitative data collection instrument in various fields of knowledge in recent decades due to the time efficiency of working in a group session. (Rodas & Pacheco, 2020) The focus group technique has been used by researchers in the social and behavioral sciences for over eighty years. However, due to the wide range of information regarding focus groups, it was considered pertinent to have a clear guide for the execution of this technique in the social area (p.1).

Ethics

All the girls and adolescents in institutional care are under a protective order, either judicial or administrative, issued by the competent authorities. Eight girls and adolescents have been in institutional care for more than a year, six have been there for one to three months, and six have been there for four to six months.

Regarding the effects of separation, 18 girls and adolescents experience emotional changes, often feeling sad, becoming easily stressed, crying, and irritable. They also find it difficult to adapt to a place that is not their home. Two adolescents stated that they are well cared for and better looked after. They mentioned that they did not receive this level of care from their families at home because they are orphans and other relatives did not want to take responsibility for them due to their age.

Regarding the care they receive at the care unit, they report receiving five meals a day, clothing, psychological and social work support, medical and dental care, home visits, and in-person visits with family members through the accompaniment of the Family Facilitator. They also receive legal advice to understand the status of their cases and how

long they have to wait to return to their families. Additionally, they have support with daily activities and academic reinforcement from professional tutors.

Of the total number of girls and adolescents at the Dorotea Carrión Shelter, 13 stated that they wish to return to their families, while 7 girls and adolescents assume this is not possible because their cases are complex and are under investigation by the Prosecutor's Office, which hinders their prompt return home. Through dialogue with the girls and adolescents, they expressed their request to the judges handling their cases, asking for the investigations into their cases to be completed, their personal, social, familial, and legal situations to be clarified, and the reasons for their separation from their families to be released from the foster care center so they can be with their families and share all the moments they once did.

The focus group technique allowed researchers to understand the girls' and adolescents' opinions about the length of their stay in the institutional care system. They also shared their perspectives on how institutional care has contributed positively or negatively to their lives, as well as their feelings about returning to their families, since they miss their home environment, customs, and food from their region. Most of the girls and adolescents served come from provinces in the coastal region and reported difficulty adapting to a place that is not their own. In these spaces, the girls and teenagers interacted and came to the conclusion that they want to return to their families, and that in the foster care center they have acquired rules, habits and routines, which at first were difficult for them to adapt to these rules of coexistence and to this new way of life. In addition, the 15-year-old teenagers say that in the foster care center they have been given the necessary tools so that they can undertake different projects and generate their own resources.

Discussion

The product of this research was qualitative in nature; therefore, it involved the recognition of multiple realities and extremely important facts from the sources investigated. The results are highly dependent on emotions and exhaustive analyses of the content of the information sources, demonstrating a creative and dynamic character in the study of structural and situational contexts. This approach sought to identify the nature of the problems investigated, which involves the selection of the object of study, as well as the research designs. The usefulness of the results is based on the underlying institutional, social, or personal interests that contribute to improving the living conditions of the subjects and, consequently, to social transformation.

The theoretical framework allowed for a theoretical argument regarding the effects and the organization of events generated by the family separation of girls and adolescents at the Dorotea Carrión Shelter. It also included a description of the basic concepts used, based on the theory underpinning the research, from an innovative perspective with concrete theoretical definitions using technical language. This approach aimed to facilitate the reader's understanding of the study and to give it coherence and meaning.

It enabled the identification of the causes and effects of family separation, as well as the clarity and awareness of the epistemological framework. This involves being historically conscious of the context from which science is conducted, allowing for the integration and connection of information not only from a methodological standpoint, but also providing a holistic and comprehensive view of the phenomenon. This approach respects the fundamental elements of research, maintaining rigor from epistemic, methodological, and theoretical perspectives, fulfilling the requirements of the method, and considering the ideas with which we engage and the judgments we share or disagree with other authors.



Implementing an individual social intervention plan allowed for the reintegration of girls and adolescents into their families as a solution and for the general benefit, as a means to change the disadvantaged situations of society, through the exploration of better options to achieve the objectives and goals, with the respective planning of the stages and routes to achieve them in order to satisfy the needs through a set of organized and interconnected activities, to achieve certain specific goals and objectives whose purpose is to improve the quality of life of the girls and adolescents as well as their families.

Conclusions

The results allowed for an analysis of the effects of family separation on girls and adolescents at the Dorotea Carrión Shelter in the city of Loja. This was achieved through the recognition of multiple realities and highly significant facts from the sources investigated. The results are heavily dependent on the emotions and exhaustive analysis of the content of the information sources.

The comprehensive development of children and adolescents is closely linked to the social and family environment. However, if violence, insults, and other negative manifestations permeate these spaces, there is a high risk that they will replicate these behaviors in other settings. It is important to note that the family is one of the most protected institutions internationally. This protection revolves around their daily interaction circle, which is why, when this closest circle is harmful to the child or adolescent, it is pertinent to consider removing them from that environment and seeking an alternative that allows them to enjoy their rights. The effects of institutional care involve the emotional aspect linked to communication, which is vital for a child's development. However, a deterioration in emotional communication can lead to behavioral changes that, over time, result in a lack of appreciation for the figure who was meant to be important to the child, isolation among family members, distancing in family

relationships, and a lack of affection from caregivers due to living with figures other than their parents.

The creation of an individualized social intervention plan is crucial in the care unit, as it will allow for the reintegration of girls and adolescents into their families as quickly as possible. This helps prevent damage to family and attachment relationships, interpersonal relationships, and avoids social stress, depression, and self-esteem issues in girls and adolescents.

Limitations and future research

The reasons for institutional care include sexual violence, which encompasses everything from denying sexual and emotional needs to forcing unwanted sexual activity or rape. This type of violence prevents the expression of pleasure, causes harm to the victim's body, and violates their freedom, dignity, and physical integrity through malicious looks or comments, groping, and forced sexual relations. Sexual violence is an expression of power exercised over the most vulnerable: women, girls, boys, and adolescents, who are more prone to sexual assault, subject to oppression, and defenselessness within a patriarchal context of discrimination.

Among the characteristics of the male aggressor is a higher sex drive, derived from the amount of testosterone in the blood (a steroid hormone of the androgen group), which the body cannot properly assimilate. This is compounded by the frequent use of violent behaviors and the learning of the benefits derived from them. Complexes that limit their sexual identity, which can lead to an interest in exploring various sexual stimuli to overcome the situation. Sociocultural demands that impose stereotypes associated with a strong sexual drive, neglecting sentimental aspects, respect, and social commitments (Gómez and Juárez, 2014, p. 151)

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there are no competing financial, personal, institutional or intellectual interests that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare the use of artificial intelligence ChatGPT, current version, for English linguistics and grammar adjustments. The use of artificial intelligence was not applied for statistical analysis, methodology, texts and interpretation of the results.

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