

Review article

Experience report on ADRA I: harm reduction and mental health

Relato de experiência na ADRA I: redução de danos e saúde mental

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Abstract

Objective: to investigate the impact of active listening and reception among a population in a situation of psychosocial vulnerability, composed of fifty single men sheltered at the Adventist Development and Assistance Resources Agency (ADRA I) in the neighborhood of Barbalho in Salvador, Bahia. Report: descriptive study based on the analysis of experience of trainees in the 3rd year of Psychology, through field diaries of group interventions between October and November 2024. The sessions were designed to establish a safe and welcoming environment in which participants could share experiences without judgment, strengthening their right to dignity, individuality and subjectivity. During the meetings, exercises were applied to validate their emotional expressions. Final considerations: the experience highlights the importance of psychosocial support actions to those who are highlighting the scope of work in achieving human dignity and coping with social inequalities through actions to strengthen and cope with daily difficulties. The application of group intervention provides a space for production of emotional expression and interpersonal interaction, highlighting the importance of psychological presence in vulnerable and susceptible populations.

Keywords: Harm reduction. Psychosocial vulnerability. Reception. Psychosocial support.

Resumo

Objetivo: investigar o impacto da escuta ativa e acolhimento junto a uma população em situação de vulnerabilidade psicossocial, composta por cinquenta homens solteiros abrigados na Agência Adventista de Desenvolvimento e Recursos Assistenciais (ADRA I) no bairro do Barbalho em Salvador, Bahia.

Relato: estudo descritivo pautado na análise de experiência de estagiárias do 3º ano de Psicologia, através de diários de campo de intervenções grupais entre outubro e novembro de 2024. As sessões foram planejadas para estabelecer um ambiente seguro e acolhedor, em que os participantes pudessem compartilhar experiências sem julgamento, fortalecendo seu direito à dignidade, individualidade e subjetividade. Durante os encontros, exercícios foram aplicados para validar suas expressões emocionais.

Considerações finais: a experiência destaca a importância de ações de suporte psicossocial àqueles que são alvo de discriminação e preconceito, ressaltando a abrangência do trabalho na obtenção da dignidade humana e enfrentamento das desigualdades sociais através de ações de fortalecimento e enfrentamento para as dificuldades cotidianas. A aplicação da intervenção grupal propicia um espaço para produção de expressão emocional e interação interpessoal, evidenciando a importância da presença psicológica em populações vulneráveis e suscetíveis.

Palavras-chave: Redução de danos. Vulnerabilidade Psicossocial. Acolhimento. Suporte Psicossocial.

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Introduction

The theme of Harm Reduction is not a consensus concept in the literature or among the technicians who operate it; however, it is easy to define from its practices: these are actions aimed at minimizing risks and damages of biological nature, Psychosocial and economic induced or secondary to the use/abuse of drugs without necessarily requiring a reduction in consumption of such substances¹.

Harm Reduction was thought as a public health strategy in Brazil in Santos-SP in 1989, due to the high rate of HIV infection by injecting drugs². Harm Reduction has advanced over the years with the objective of providing alternatives to the logic that focused on total abstinence, adopting a diversity of demands, expanding the possibilities of care for the population using substances.

The expansion of actions aimed at drug users has been strengthened since the publication of Ordinance n. 457, of April 16, 2003, when Harm Reduction becomes a central guideline in the National Social Assistance Policy - PNAS (2004)³, consolidating itself as an integral and inclusive care strategy.

The survey population is a group that passes through psychosocial vulnerability, manifesting itself through social exclusion, prejudice and invisibility in various contexts.

People are not vulnerable, they are vulnerable because of a certain situation, for a period also determined⁴.

Men in a situation of social vulnerability, in particular, face specific challenges related to the rupture of family ties, difficulties of integration into the labor market and social stigmatization, often resulting in a state of isolation and psychological helplessness.

The objective of this study was to understand the effects of psychological interventions in broader contexts of harm reduction and psychosocial vulnerability, providing active strengthening self-esteem and encouraging social reintegration through group interventions.

Report

This study emerges from the partnership between students of the Psychology course of the Unime Anhanguera Faculty and ADRA I, with the objective of offering psychological support to a group of men in social vulnerability in the city of Salvador, BA. This initiative sought to understand how active listening and welcoming practices can impact this population, using as a basis the records in field diaries produced throughout the interventions carried out between October and November 2024.

To contextualize this experience, it is essential to understand the work of harm reduction carried out by ADRA, linked to the Secretariat of Social Development of the city of Salvador, based



on actions of Social Assistance, which determines the arising from the use of addictive products, substances or drugs.

ADRA is the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Agency for Development and Relief Resources, which is present in more than one hundred and ten countries. In Brazil, it is organized into eighteen regions that serve all the Brazilian states. These regions direct their work in order to promote development and timely relief to people in vulnerable situations, prioritizing the management of shelters and transit houses providing refuge and promoting security and necessary assistance for their needs. In Salvador, it has three poles: two in Barbalho and one in Boca do Rio with a capacity to host one hundred and fifty people. This report of experience was developed in the unit of Barbalho, known as ADRA I that, in total, assists fifty "single" men. The reference team is composed of an administrative coordinator, a social worker, a psychologist, an administrative assistant, twelve socio-educators, a general services assistant and a driver. These professionals carry out activities aimed at the target public, which are street citizens, male, referred by the services of the Social Development Secretariat.

The physical structure of ADRA I is simple and functional. Those assisted sleep in bunk beds in shared rooms, with sheets, pillows and a towel. There is tank and cleaning material available for washing your clothes, as well as personal hygiene supplies. They receive three meals daily and a simple supper before bedtime. There is a menu to be served by the two local cooks. It is also organized with guiding rules regarding the time of entry and exit and number of possible absences.

The experience reported here details the effects of psychological interventions through group interventions with conversation wheels and group dynamics, during four meetings held on using the reception through an ethical posture of careful approach to the assisted and qualified listening.

The activities developed during the meeting were:

1. Emotional trash x Baggage of life: It began with a dynamic ice-breaking to fix the name of all the people in the group, which left the atmosphere light and relaxed. Then, they were asked to write down points that they would like to exclude from their lives. They reported what they wrote and then threw it in the trash, symbolizing a negative charge that they no longer want to carry. On the occasion, there was emotional mobilization, outbursts and sharing of some information that made them be welcomed in ADRA-I. Then, they talked about the positive points that they would like to carry in their luggage for life. At this moment, the hope of better days became present. There was the participation of 16 viewers, exciting reports and the result was impactful for all. In the end, they wanted to know if our group would come back next week.
2. Treasury Box: Three boxes were arranged on three tables at the front of the room. Those assisted should open and report what they were seeing, through adjectives. At first, I had an image of Ivete Sangalo and the hosts spoke adjectives such as: "queen", "sympathy", "cordiality" and "kindness".



The second box had the image of Lázaro Ramos and were said the words: "representativeness", "admiration for color" and "carries culture". The third box had the mirror and some expressed words of demerit, but most said positive things about themselves. There was the participation of 07 assisted and we were informed that in that week they had received their benefits, which makes some of them are more absent during the day.

3. Support Network: We were prepared to work on the theme of frustration (because it had been asked by the institution that the participants would like). However, at the time of starting, it was not well accepted and the preceptor immediately changed to "Support Network". In this way, the first person with a string in hand, threw the roll to a person saying good things that wished her. The attendees passed the string among themselves, thanking and speaking words of support to colleagues who made a difference in their daily lives. There was the participation of 05 assisted and, that week, it was stressed that there was another activity taking place in the institution of dental services. A curiosity occurred, because it had been reported in the media during the week, that an autistic boy had left Espírito Santo by bus towards Salvador to meet Léo Santana. This boy, called "W" was in ADRA I and participated in the dynamics of the web. Despite the difficulty of verbal communication, he made himself understood and showed great conviction that he would realize his dream. In the evening, we received photos and videos of him finding his idol at an artist's show.
4. Conclusion of the internship: Participants were asked to make a representation of what meant the work carried out by the group. Paper, magazines, scissors, glue were provided and they could write, draw or make collages. There was the participation of 07 people. Participant "D" made a collage of the image of a couple, highlighting the importance of women to help men get out of the drug world. The participant "R." also spoke of the importance of women and that one day he was a people, when he was married and who liked to have participated in the activities and that they were incredible situations, and would take them for life. The other participants said they expected more similar activities in the next semester and that they liked it very much and some trainees also gave their testimonials. We ended with a collective hot dog and the feeling that we have a lot to work with this audience.

From the students' perspective, the experience could have been even more enriching with an extended period of service. At the end of each session, we held meetings with the preceptor, occasions that provided us with deep and exciting reflections on the reality of people in situations of vulnerability, structural prejudices and the essence of humanity.

The practice of Harm Reduction is still considered a taboo for substance users, as well as family members and friends, and can be attributed to insufficient public policy action⁵. For this reason, sharing experiences with this public can help in the development of other positive actions.

Throughout the work, it was observed the strengthening of the links established by those assisted with the group of students, who showed interest in continuing to participate in similar initiatives. These individuals, often marked by the rupture of family ties, difficulties in integrating into the labor market and social stigmatization, face high levels of isolation and psychological



helplessness. Despite this, they reaffirmed their status as subjects of rights, worthy of equal opportunities and social recognition.

Final Thoughts

Group interventions play an important role in promoting safe spaces for the expression of emotions, sharing experiences and strengthening social bonds. The reported experience demonstrated the positive impact of these practices in contexts of social vulnerability, creating welcoming and reflection environments that favored the reflection on the re-meaning of participants' life trajectories.

The activities developed evidenced the transformative potential of group dynamics. The dynamic "Emotional Waste" encouraged the symbolic release of negative loads and the valorization of positive aspects, while the activity "Surprise Boxes" promoted an exercise in self-image and representativeness. The "Support Network" approach highlighted the importance of interpersonal ties and an atmosphere of solidarity in coping with adversity.

Despite the variation in adherence to activities, the results indicated significant contributions in the construction of a welcoming space where participants could think about challenges and potentialities. The demand for continuity by those assisted reinforces the importance of psychological practices that promote citizenship, self-esteem and emotional well-being in contexts of social exclusion.

This report seeks to strengthen the debate on the relevance of interventions based on reception and active listening, highlighting its contribution to significant social transformations in the lives of participants.

Author contributions

Patrícia Machado Luz Hardmann: conception and design of the research; analysis and interpretation of the data; writing of the manuscript. **Cleber da Silva Papaterra dos Santos:** critical review of the manuscript concerning the intellectual content and final presentation. The authors approved the final version of the manuscript and declare responsible for all aspects of the work, including its precision and integrity.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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