

“Surviving”: social vulnerability experienced by suburban adolescents*

“Sobrevivendo”: vulnerabilidade social vivenciada por adolescentes em uma periferia urbana* (abstract: p. 17)

“Sobreviviendo”: vulnerabilidad social vivida por adolescentes en una periferia urbana (resumen: p. 17)

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Qualitative study, theoretically based on Castel’s “Social Vulnerability” concept and, methodologically grounded on the constructivist perspective of the Grounded Theory. The objective was to understand, from the perspective of the bioecological model of human development, social phenomena experienced by adolescents who were assisted at a reference social assistance center. The strategies used for data collection were observation and interviews in focus groups. The theoretical sampling consisted of ten meetings, which were held between August and December 2015, with twenty adolescents. The analyzed data show the existence of a multifactorial complex in the family and community dynamics, which subjects the adolescents to oppression or to overcoming their limitations, explained in the central phenomenon “surviving”. In conclusion, the understanding of contradictions inherent to these adolescents’ reality may provide strategies to promote their rights to healthy development.

Keywords: Health vulnerability. Violence. Adolescents. Anomie (social).



Introduction

Adolescence is a phase of biological, psychological and social transition, between childhood and adult life. It is a historical-social construction that is influenced by the social dynamics in the different contexts and cultural trends in which a person develops. These influences, in turn, interfere in the development of personality, and, consequently, the behavior of adolescents, who throughout the socialization process, seek to achieve an adult status that is in accordance with the environment in which they live. Even though some changes are common to most adolescents, socioeconomic determinants expose them to illness and marginalization in particular ways¹ website access codes, or print supplements that may come packaged with the bound book. Helps students understand how culture impacts development in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Grounded in a global cultural perspective (within and outside of the US).

The communities in which they live and develop are important social determinants. From this point of view, in lower-income communities, lack of social resources and social inequality contribute to the emergence of violence, drug trafficking and the weakening of family and community ties, which directly affect the most vulnerable individuals: adolescents. These environments represent unsuccessful public policies and their failure to ensure the rights of those who live in these communities^{2,3} and assessing associated factors. METHOD: The Brazilian survey PeNSE (National Adolescent School-based Health Survey). Lack of social and family support can also be partially associated with the inability of many adolescents facing the misfortunes of delinquent, antisocial, and even violent practices experienced with peers and in the community environment⁴. In this context, the support of schools, social services and health institutions is essential to avoid social exclusion⁵. However, the fragmented outlook on the phenomena that condition social vulnerability contributes to these uncoordinated, one-off, and not rarely, flawed actions. Thus, it is important to become familiar with the perspective of adolescents themselves, since they experience vulnerability in their daily lives and, therefore, are in a better position to talk about the functioning of the context inherent to these vulnerabilities.

This study was based on the bioecological theory of human development (BTHD)⁶, which uses the process-person-context-time model as its framework. Process is defined as the dynamics of an individual with their biological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral characteristics in a given context. The context is the interconnected system of the ecology of human development and is formed by the microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem⁶. The last item, time, is understood as the chronosystem, moderating changes throughout one's life course.

The BTHD model expands on the understanding of researchers about the economic, institutional, and cultural interactions in different contexts, including socially vulnerable communities. These are marked by a fragile economy, weakened social integration mechanisms and family ties, permeated by work relationships.

The following research question guided the present study: What are the main social phenomena experienced by adolescents assisted at a reference social assistance center? The objective was to understand the social phenomena experienced by adolescents who were assisted at a reference social assistance center in the metropolitan region of Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil, from the perspective of the bioecology of human development.



Method

Typology

This was a qualitative study based on the grounded theory (GT), a constructivist approach. Grounded theory brings researchers closer to the phenomenon with the goal of extracting the perceptions and meanings given by subjects to a context or object⁷. Constructivist GT provides guidelines about how to organize, analyze, and understand research data within the scope of its geographic, ideological, and cultural context, according to a theory that explains the studied phenomenon, what it means to the participants, and how they deal with this phenomenon⁸.

Location

The study was conducted in a reference social assistance center in the urban periphery of the metropolitan region of Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil. At the time of data collection, the unit was open to the surrounding community, which was in precarious social and infrastructural conditions.

Reference social assistance centers (CRAS) are municipal units and are considered the entryway into the Brazilian Unified Social Service System (SUAS), which aims to assist socially vulnerable individuals. Thus, their services are allocated in territories with high rates of vulnerability and aim to coordinate and provide basic social protection programs and projects⁹.

Sampling and data collection

The participants were selected after a meeting with parents or legal guardians, CRAS professionals and the research team. The adolescents who were assisted at the CRAS were invited to participate in focus groups, scheduled between August and December 2015. The setting selected for the meetings fit between 15 and 20 people.

Inclusion criteria were adolescents 13 years old or older, enrolled in and attending school, and who were assisted by the basic protection services of the municipality's social service system. Adolescents under the age of 13 were excluded.

Because of the way the service functioned, new participants were included at different times of the study, as they were registered with the CRAS. Thus the group was open to new members and there was no minimum frequency attending the meetings required in order to ensure the maximum use of data¹⁰. The meetings lasted an average of two hours, with groups of six to ten participants. In all, twenty adolescents 13 to 18 years old participated, of which 15 were male and five, female.

The meetings were mediated by the following guiding question: "What is your perception of being an adolescent in this community?" An author of this article, who did not have any previous relationship with the participants, conducted the focus groups with the help of two research assistants. The data were registered using a



digital voice recorder and then fully transcribed after each meeting. These transcriptions were complemented by the notes of the assistants who were trained to record all of the group's movements, including what they said. The sample of twenty participants was obtained over ten meetings, considering theoretical data saturation⁷, i.e., when no new information emerged, coinciding with the predicted period for carrying out the study.

Participants were identified by the letter "A" followed by the number of the order in which they entered the group, thus ensuring anonymity.

Data analysis

Data analysis looked for patterns of similarities and differences among the data according to the comparative method proposed by GT. This method is a dynamic process of data collection and comparative analyses among codes, codes and concepts, and concepts and categories, whether from the same interview or different interviews.

During coding, the data fragments are categorized concisely so as to represent the information. In GT, coding involves two phases: open coding, in which categories are formed, and axial coding, in which codes are organized and there is continuous comparison among the data. In axial coding, the codes can be created and/or objectified in broad categories, as presented in Table 1.

Frame 1. Representation of groups of theoretical categories, categories and subcategories

Theoretical Category	Category	Subcategory
Living with the paradox of drugs: pleasure, overcoming, and oppression	Causal condition of oppression	Violence that originates from symbols of drugs
		Use that leads to addiction
		Violence inherent to drugs
	Drugs as a means to social success	Trafficking to complement income
		Trafficking as a job
	Meanings of use through pleasure and relief	Drugs provide pleasure
		Drugs to escape reality
		Using drugs to socialize

Axial analysis grouped codes by conceptual divergences and similarities and led to the definition of the categories' concepts and properties. The analysis included memos and diagrams representing the categories. Last, theoretical coding integrated the categories and concepts, in addition to translating the phenomenon observed in the data. The analysis yielded three theoretical categories, which will be presented below⁷.

Ethical aspects

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), under protocol no. 432.008, in accordance with Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council. Parents or legal guardians were invited to a meeting in which the objectives, risks and benefits of the present study were presented. After the meeting, the parents were given free and informed consent forms to sign. Similarly, the parents or legal guardians of the adolescents who entered the group later were instructed about the study and also received the consent forms to sign.

Results and discussion

The findings provide an understanding of the main social phenomena that adolescents experienced, revealing a complex system of factors and phenomena. These are interconnected, surpassing social vulnerability and coming together to form the central phenomenon, "surviving", as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Relationship between central category "Surviving: adolescent subject floating between social oppression and overcoming life", and secondary phenomena.

The following three important phenomena were identified: "Experiencing violence in the sociocommunity and family context"; "Living with the paradox of drugs: pleasure, overcoming, and oppression"; and "Seeking to overcome", which sustained the phenomenon "Surviving: adolescent subject floating between social oppression and overcoming life".



The data point to the presence of a dynamic in community and family contexts composed of factors that limit adolescents' social development, represented by the central phenomenon "Surviving". Adolescents float between oppression and overcoming, a process that results in either the breaking of bonds or social cohesion. In this dynamic, often the same factor (school, family, and gangs) can take on a meaning related both to oppression and overcoming.

The phenomena described above will be detailed and sustained in the concepts and categories that emerged in the representations of adolescents of their community setting and family life and their intervening and contextual factors.

Experiencing violence in the sociocommunity context

The violence experienced by adolescents was represented by demonstrations of homophobia, racism, sexism, sexual harassment, and physical violence. It was present in their families, schools, in the community, and in incipient public security policies. Furthermore, adolescents used violence as a relational mechanism.

The participants viewed this phenomenon in the forms of physical and psychological violence. The latter was associated with drug use or drug trafficking of marijuana, the presence of marijuana symbols and associated objects, music, and images on clothing. Violence inherent to the drug represented a causal and intervening complex, present in their main social environments, family and school, in addition to the community in general. In the community, the adolescents suffered police actions motivated by suspicion in involvement in drug use or trafficking, which was aimed primarily at the boys:

[...] The guy came up slowly, then when he saw him, he tried to run, tripped and fell, then the guy came and shot him in cold blood, "Ta! Ta!" in the head [fact that occurred in the square] [...] He [the police officer] [...] made him hold it like this, he got the lighter and started burning his bracelet [...] when he got close to his finger, the officer asked: 'Is it burning little boy?' 'Is it? [...]' 'hold it some more then [...]'. (A6)

Violence in family relationships was associated with the presence of drug trafficking and drug use. In one instance, the main person involved was the brother of one of the participants:

I'm afraid of my brother [...] (A14)

[...] Because his brother hits her [...] (A6)

[...] he got beaten and the officer told me to go in [...]. My brother was beaten because he was selling drugs. (A14)



Furthermore, there was physical and verbal aggression, negligence, sexual harassment, and discrimination in the school environment, which was defined as a space of conflict and also a place for drug use initiation:

The teacher told him to put away his phone and he said: "I won't put it away and you just stay quiet or else I'll shoot you." (A6)

I told the coordinator, but because [the teacher] was an older teacher he couldn't do anything, and he also told me to use more "well-behaved" clothes. (A7)

Forms of violence through racism and homophobia were observed among the adolescents:

Being black is a reason to be discriminated [...] If you're already black, damn [...] Look at all the nicknames! (A6)

I feel angry at gay people. (A2)

We don't want those people around! [...] But I'm not prejudiced! (A9)

The participants reported having daily experiences with violence. Furthermore, they had naturalized and accepted certain forms of violence, such as homophobia, and thus they were sometimes perpetrators of violence, and at others, victims.

Living with the paradox of drugs: pleasure, overcoming, and oppression

The second phenomenon deals with the experience of drugs for adolescents in situations of social vulnerability. It unfolds into the meanings of use for pleasure, relief, drugs as a means to social success, and the causal condition of oppression.

The meanings of use for pleasure and relief were attributed to feelings of sadness, depression, and peer pressure:

I think because of depression [...] I'm not going to blame my friends [...] but I can't say they didn't offer it to me [...] (A16)

They use it [marijuana] to calm down, chill out [...] (A3)

Another meaning identified in this phenomenon was the concept of drugs as a means of social success, translated in the opportunity of earning money through trafficking, associated to the understanding of trafficking as a job, or as a form to complement income, as seen in the following excerpts:



[...] Some people make 500 reais a month! You can survive if you don't have a family [...] That's why traffickers earn an average of 15 grand a month doing practically nothing! (A6, A4)

The phenomenon of drugs as a causal condition of oppression was the main one, reported by the participants in all social and family settings. The meanings of use and trafficking were identified as causal mechanisms: use that leads to addiction. At other times, they were intervening mechanisms: violence inherent to drugs, or contextual mechanisms, violence that originates from symbols of the drug. Oppression was presented in different forms of violence (physical psychological, prejudice, perpetrated especially by public authorities, such as police officers):

[...] If drugs get into the family, it destroys the family [...] (A1)

When the police see the boys who wear these bracelets, they rip them off because they think they are all involved in traffic (A4)

He's been there two years, he's my colleague [...]. (A4)

Go back again, right [...] His cycle [...] he went back to what he used to do [traffic]. (A6)

The complexity of the drug phenomenon, was, therefore, translated in the meanings attributed by the adolescents as a "means to success" and "causal condition of oppression", in this case, associated primarily with police brutality.

Seeking to overcome

The search for overcoming daily adversities was represented in the categories "facing reality" and "surviving":

I want to live, but I survive [...] surviving is bad [...] (A7)

Mechanisms for overcoming were associated with family, especially mothers, work, and sports, which represent supportive ties that help them resist community pressures that worsen their relationships with drug use and/or trafficking and with violence.

Family was described as a source of protection, with expressions of positive affection and bonds, especially with the mother figure.

There I have my father, my mother, my siblings [...]. I love my mother [...] I trust my mother; I talk to her [...] I get home at night [...] and I hang around talking to her [...] I tell her everything. (A1)



Work, school, and sports were described as ideal mechanisms for social insertion, behavioral change, recovery, and leisure in the community:

Managing a business, I got into it when I started working [...] before I was a bum, but not anymore. (A9)

[School] "A place where you learn, have fun, do everything. (A6)

They could build a place to recover adolescents [...] They should provide treatment, soccer, school. (A1)

Thus, the mechanisms for overcoming mentioned by the participants show the frailty of the social apparatus for community development.

Discussion

The findings provide an understanding of the main social phenomena experienced by the adolescents and that place them in situations of social vulnerability. The participants exposed a social context marked by limited access to basic social services, violence disseminated among the community, and the consistent insertion of the drug phenomena, as shown by the use and/or experience of drug trafficking. These results are similar to those of two other studies, one conducted in Brazil and the other in the United States^{11,12}. In these investigations, the participants were youth offenders from socially vulnerable backgrounds and low education levels. Most were black or brown, residing in communities marked by the absence of the state and who found support in drug use and/or trafficking.

In the community context, the streets were presented as a place for leisure and susceptibility to violence, which was conceived as inherent to the relationships among members. Violence was experienced in assaults and murders, which were sometimes committed by other adolescents and at other time, in police interventions. Police brutality emerged as a producer of meanings that placed police figures as agents of oppression and fear.

In itself, the experience of stressful and marginalized environments, such as in the community investigated in the present investigation, is understood as a violation of basic human rights. This situation victimizes individuals, while hindering their access to mechanisms of social insertion and cohesion¹³⁻¹⁵. In these environments, violence has direct victims, while often indirectly affecting children and adolescents, resulting in increased psychological suffering¹³. This leads to severe repercussions when it comes to solidifying these victims' values, who may become future agents of violence¹¹.

The violence experienced by the adolescents in this study was related to different forms of aggression, one being racism. Naturalized racial segregation in Brazilian society contributes to segregating black or brown people into poverty, limiting



their access to social development. This is materialized in the premature and violent mortality rates of adolescents, whose main setting is the streets^{11,14}.

In a weakened community setting, access to sports and leisure is scarce, and therefore, the streets become a place of social constructions. However, the streets also make individuals susceptible, directly or indirectly, to the violence practiced by other adolescents, by recruiting adults, or by even the police in some circumstances. This violence affects mainly black and brown male adolescents¹⁶⁻¹⁹.

In 2013, the rate of homicide of black and brown adolescents between the age of 16 and 17 in Brazil was 173% higher than that of white males of the same age. In terms of gender, some studies show a concentration of homicide victims among the population of male adolescents and young adults^{16,18,20-23}. These data corroborate those of the present study, whose research subjects were, for the most part, male, and previously recognized by the SUAS as potentially vulnerable. These different studies report selective violence and the importance of public policies that are not only specific for this public, but also effective and fair^{18,23}.

The participants expressed antagonistic behaviors: at times they were victims of different forms of violence; at others, they were perpetrators, an aspect perceived in their expressions of homophobia. Homophobia is a social, historical, community, family, and religious construction, which, sustained by misogynistic and sexist ideals, strengthens heteronormative ideas that impose relationships of power and knowledge about the sexes²⁴. One study that investigated the homophobic conceptions of adolescents found moderate tolerance to homosexuality²⁵ obtidos pelo uso de uma escala Likert, foram analisados por uma técnica estatística multivariada. Análise fatorial foi realizada, e seis fatores (extraídos pelo método das componentes principais e o método de rotação oblíqua.

The violence suffered in schools was represented by physical and verbal aggression, sexual harassment, and the negligence of teachers and educational managers. However, violence present in the school environment is a reflection of the violence external to these institutions and the interpersonal relationships in this environment. Thus, violent events that occur in these settings are interconnected to a complex multidimensional phenomenon that violates human rights, affects all social structures, and contributes to damaging the psychosocial constitution of adolescents^{13,26,27}.

Equally, intrafamilial violence is associated with the influences of political-social and cultural factors that generate inequalities, characteristic of vulnerable societies, and interfere in the level and quality of the relational insertion of families, and, consequently, adolescents. Thus, when individuals do not find the necessary support to overcome daily limitations, they are more fragile before phenomena such as violence and drug use²⁸⁻³⁰.

Drug use among adolescents does not occur occasionally and/or randomly; rather, it is associated with social-environmental factors distributed over the spaces and dimensions of life. This phenomenon is related to violence, the use of illegal substances by parents, low performance at school, weak ties with schools, a community's tolerance to drug consumption, low level of information about drugs, the need to express power, and low self-esteem^{31,32} especially in industrialised societies. One hypothesis which could explain



such findings is that parental investment is likely to be diluted in families without both natural parents. Most empirical studies have examined the influence of only one type of family disruption or composition (e.g. father absence).

In vulnerable populations, such as the one in the present study, weak social cohesion introduces these subjects to delinquent practices, such as drug trafficking, violence, and stealing, aspects that will have repercussions into their adult life³³.

In the present study, marijuana was identified as the most consumed illegal substance, as shown by the male adolescents. In Brazil, it is also the main illegal substance consumed, especially among adolescents, sustained by the constant presence in communities and the often antagonistic meanings that attributed to "drugs", symbolizing things such as resistance to repression, social condition, and an escape from the reality of violence, exclusion, and suffering².

The complexity of the phenomena of drugs and violence, in this study, was displayed in the strong relationship between both. Drug use and trafficking represented an escape from reality and violence, but the simple presence of these substances or the symbology associated with marijuana also contributed to violent and oppressive events, data that differ from those of another study³⁴. The contradictory meanings given to the use of marijuana can be explained by the resignification that the phenomenon has undergone in the moral and normative representations of society, a fact that, as occurred in the investigated community, generates or forges demarcations between groups and places, determined by stereotypes, such as that of the black periphery population³⁵.

Adherence to marijuana use is also determined by factors inherent to the social and family contexts, and is evidence of the predictive potential of an individual's involvement with their peers and family ties^{36,37} and 2. The use of psychoactive substances, to a lesser or greater extent, enhances social vulnerability of adolescents, affects health, social development, and healthy development. Furthermore, it contributes to student failure, ruptures with jobs and family, while also weakening individuals against violence and crime²⁸.

Similar to initiation to drug use, the insertion of adolescents into the criminal practice of drug trafficking is a multifactorial phenomenon. As a parallel mechanism, it is a form to overcome social limitations, as well as a way to fulfill their need for affirmation and recognition in the community³⁸. In states with inequality, lack of equality of access to goods and possibilities and the concurrent lack of guaranteed rights foster parallel pathways that ensure survival both in informal employment, illegal commerce, drug trafficking, and antisocial practices, such as theft. When such social symptoms last for long periods, they contribute to social anomie and symptoms of anxiety and fear in populations, which precede deviant behaviors^{11,15}.

The symptom of anomie was observed in the group of adolescents when they expressed uncertainty and insecurities using the words "survive" and "facing reality", even though both also denote motivation to overcome adversity. The mechanisms used for overcoming were family, with special mention to mothers, and, after a thorough reading of the data, drug trafficking. Being involved with the trafficking of psychoactive substances was not limited to the need for income, but was sustained by the longing for social identity³⁹, self-esteem, and a having a role to play, even if distant from ethics and morals⁴⁰.



Work occupied a large part of the participants' lives, who demonstrated the centrality of work activities when they defined it as a mechanism for survival, social identity, and necessary for family conformity. Considering these aspects, another study showed that adolescents recognized work as a means for recovering values and social insertion⁴¹. However, for adolescents in situations of vulnerability, whose access to labor market is limited and who also have difficulties reconciling work with school, dropping out of school is an easy choice, weakening their social development.

For the adolescents in this study, school occupied a paradoxical position: they recognized that academic education was essential to being able to grow in the labor market; however, they also mentioned severe limitations in accessing a university education, which culminates in student dropout and hinders social ascension and the achievement of life goals. Limited access to education and the quality of educational relationships fostered anomie and anxiety, which for some, justified violence and social ascension through drug trafficking.

As observed in the data, anomie reflects government failure to ensure the rights of children and adolescents as established in the Brazilian Statute of the Child and Adolescent – ECA⁴². The failure of childhood and youth policies deepens inequalities and exclusion, because there are no effective established means to guarantee fundamental rights. In these contexts, it is possible to observe deviations from social norms and people who are inept at social relationships. These symptoms, increase the frailty of the most excluded communities^{11,13}.

Considering the phenomena of overcoming and positive ties, family represented another aspect that supports the development of children and adolescents. This was exemplified by the figure of the mother, whose role is to develop her children's social skills. Social skills are behaviors that collaborate towards competent social performance in interpersonal tasks, with a high perspective of positive effects for the individual, group, and community⁴³, which will impact in how individuals cope with the adversities that may emerge throughout their development³⁹.

Like family, sports was another positive tie for adolescents, a moment of leisure, fun, and social interaction. Sporting activities join functionality with everyday life and help in the development of positive bonds, social and affective skills, autonomy, decision-making, creativity, and independence, which favor insertion in education and work⁴⁴. Thus, these activities should be encouraged as essential tools for overcoming vulnerability and fostering social cohesion.

In the present study, the same environment or phenomenon often played ambiguous roles. Even though school was understood as necessary, it was described as a place of oppression by the participants. Moreover, family, the main factor that supports their will to overcome, was associated with the presence of drugs and violence, which equally weakened ties and exposed adolescents to social exclusion⁴⁵. The weakening of these contexts, together with ineffective policies to ensure rights, compromises the balance of social development, as adolescents cannot find the necessary stability to overcome this situation, entering the zone of social vulnerability⁵.



Conclusions

The results of the present study provide an understanding of the social vulnerability of adolescents assisted at a CRAS unit, according to their own experiences. The results also showed some of the factors that compose a multifactorial complex that conditions these adolescents to vulnerability. This complex should be considered and valued in order for social protection public policies to advance.

Thus, understanding the phenomena presented in this study can help underpin new strategies to ensure adolescents the right to healthy development, with special attention to the areas of social security, such as health, education, social services and public security. When working with adolescents, especially in vulnerable communities, it is necessary to adopt multiprofessional approaches, with a broad, protective, and intersectoral perspective.

A limitation of the present study is the fact that the data may have suffered interference because of the adolescents' previous participation in studies in the CRAS environment. Some had already been assisted at the unit and received orientation from social counselors. However, the results are consistent and translate a complex and multifaceted context of social vulnerability in the studied group, which certainly corresponds to that of other groups, even considering the specificities of their geographic and social characteristics.

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All the authors actively participated in all the phases of creating this manuscript.

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Estudo qualitativo, teoricamente sustentado no conceito de vulnerabilidade social conforme Castel e, metodologicamente, na perspectiva construtivista da Teoria Fundamentada nos Dados. O objetivo foi compreender, sob a óptica da Bioecologia do Desenvolvimento Humano, os fenômenos sociais vivenciados por adolescentes atendidos em um Centro de Referência em Assistência Social (CRAS). As estratégias utilizadas para coleta de dados foram a observação e entrevistas na técnica de grupo focal. A amostragem teórica consistiu em dez encontros, entre agosto e dezembro de 2015, com vinte adolescentes. Os dados analisados demonstram a existência de um complexo multifatorial nas dinâmicas familiar e comunitária, que submete o adolescente à opressão ou à superação das suas limitações, explicitado no fenômeno central: "sobrevivendo". Conclui-se que a compreensão das contradições inerentes à realidade dos adolescentes poderá subsidiar estratégias promotoras dos direitos dessas pessoas, o que favorece um desenvolvimento saudável.

Palavras-chave: Vulnerabilidade em saúde. Violência. Adolescente. Anomia (social).

Estudio cualitativo, teóricamente sostenido en el concepto de "Vulnerabilidad Social", conforme Castel, y metodológicamente en la perspectiva constructivista de la Teoría Fundamentada en los Datos. El objetivo fue comprender, bajo la óptica de la Bioecología del Desarrollo Humano, los fenómenos sociales vividos por adolescentes atendidos en un Centro de Referencia en Asistencia Social. Las estrategias utilizadas para la colecta de datos fueron la observación y entrevistas en la técnica de grupo focal. El muestreo teórico consistió en 10 encuentros, entre agosto y diciembre de 2015, con veinte adolescentes. Los datos analizados demuestran la existencia de un complejo multifactorial en las dinámicas familiar y comunitaria que somete al adolescente a la opresión o a la superación de sus limitaciones, explicitado en el fenómeno central: "sobreviviendo". Se concluye que la comprensión de las contradicciones inherentes a la realidad de los adolescentes podrá subsidiar estrategias promotoras de los derechos de esas personas, lo que favorece un desarrollo saludable.

Palabras clave: Vulnerabilidad en salud. Violencia. Adolescente. Anomia (social).

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