

## THE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN JUVENILE OFFENDERS AT A TREATMENT FACILITY

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**ABSTRACT.** The objective of this research is to characterize the coexistence among adolescents in a juvenile detention facility from their perspective. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten adolescents between 16 and 18 years of age in a social-educational unit in Porto Alegre. The data generated in the interviews were organized based on thematic analysis from an emic perspective, that is, generating native categories according to the perception of the participants. The adolescents revealed that criminal factions were the starting point for the establishment of friendly or rivalry relationships. They also described a set of norms that configured a collective pact in favor of an institutional order. Friendly relationships were described, indicating trust and safety as a facilitator of the moment of deprivation of liberty. There were also reports of consensual sexual relations as a result of the long period of detention. The results mainly indicate a hostile interpersonal climate that promotes psychological suffering and aggravates the situation of vulnerability. Furthermore, the coexistence of idle adolescents without the proper pedagogical following favors the perpetuation of values and interests related to involvement in criminal behaviors.

**Keywords:** Juvenile delinquency; adolescent, institutionalized; interpersonal relationship.

## O CONVÍVIO ENTRE ADOLESCENTES EM MEDIDA SOCIOEDUCATIVA DE INTERNAÇÃO

**RESUMO.** O objetivo desta pesquisa é caracterizar o convívio entre adolescentes em medida socioeducativa de internação, a partir da perspectiva dos adolescentes. Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com dez adolescentes entre 16 e 18 anos em uma unidade socioeducativa de Porto Alegre. Os dados gerados nas entrevistas foram organizados a partir de uma análise temática de perspectiva êmica, isto é, geram-se categorias nativas de acordo com a percepção dos participantes. Os adolescentes revelaram que facções criminosas eram o ponto de partida para o estabelecimento de relações amistosas ou de rivalidade; também descreveram um conjunto de normas que configuravam um pacto coletivo a favor de uma ordem institucional. Relações de

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amizades foram descritas, indicando a confiança e a segurança como facilitador do momento de internação. Houve ainda o relato da ocorrência de relações sexuais consentidas como resultado do longo período de internação. Os resultados indicam, sobretudo, um clima interpessoal hostil que promove o sofrimento psicológico e agrava a situação de vulnerabilidade. Ademais, a convivência entre adolescentes ociosos sem o devido acompanhamento pedagógico favorece a perpetuação de valores e interesses relacionados ao envolvimento com a criminalidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Adolescente em conflito com a lei; medidas socioeducativas; relações interpessoais.

## LA CONVIVENCIA ENTRE ADOLESCENTES EN MEDIDA SOCIOEDUCATIVA DE INTERNAMIENTO

**RESUMEN.** El objetivo de este artículo es caracterizar la convivencia entre adolescentes en medida socioeducativa de internamiento, desde la perspectiva de los adolescentes. Se realizó entrevistas semiestructuradas con diez adolescentes, entre 16 y 18 años, internos en una unidad socioeducativa en Porto Alegre. Los datos generados en las entrevistas fueron tratados a partir de un análisis temático émico, esto es, generando categorías nativas de acuerdo con las percepciones de los participantes. Los adolescentes revelaron que las facciones criminales eran el base para el establecimiento de relaciones de amistad y rivalidad. Describieron también un conjunto de normas que configuraban un pacto colectivo en favor de una orden institucional. Relaciones de amistad fueron retratadas, lo que indica la confianza y la seguridad como facilitadores del tiempo de internación. Había también el relato de relaciones sexuales consentidas en consecuencia del largo período de internación. Los resultados indican un clima interpersonal hostil que promueve el sufrimiento psicológico y empeora la situación de vulnerabilidad. Además, la convivencia entre adolescentes ociosos sin el apoyo pedagógico adecuado favorece la perpetuación de los valores e intereses relacionados con la implicación con la criminalidad.

**Palabras clave:** Adolescente en conflicto con la ley; medidas socioeducativas; relaciones interpersonales.

### Introduction

The general objective of this research is to characterize the coexistence between juvenile offenders at a treatment facility from their perspective. Research on such interpersonal relationships is of fundamental importance. Adolescence is a stage in the life course characterized by the shift in importance from parents to peers. Adolescents find a space to develop their own identity among their peers and thus be socially recognized (Brown & Klute, 2003). On the one hand, bonding with peers can lead to positive outcomes, as in situations where the group perpetuates prosocial values (Freitas, Santos, Ribeiro, Pimenta, & Rubin, 2018; Shin, Ryan, & North, 2019). On the other hand, the need for peer approval may favor involvement in risky behaviors (Coscioni, Farias, Rosa, & Koller, 2019; Pessoa, Coimbra, Noltemeyer, & Bottrell, 2017).

Young people from different contexts share common languages, feelings, practices, and values, but how they experience what identifies them as young people is lived according to their social group, ethnicity, gender, territoriality, and religion (Perondi & Sthephanou,

2015). Although associations between youth and criminality are frequent in the literature, this relationship must be analyzed critically. Thus, Zaluar (2012) elucidates that adolescents' involvement with the world of crime is complex and influenced by several factors, such as hopelessness concerning the possibilities of social ascension through legitimate means, everyday work, poverty, the culture that encourages consumption, exposure to violence, etc. Regarding the worsening of the conflict with the law from insertion in the so-called 'world of crime', Coscioni et al. (2019) elucidate adolescents gain social status when linked to criminal organizations. However, they are also subject to rules required by such a link, such as loyalty and homicides in the organization's name.

In Brazil, adolescents are held responsible for their infractions from the socio-educational measures (SEMs), i.e., the juridical measures ordered by the National System of Socio-Educational Assistance - SINASE<sup>7</sup> (Brazil, 2006) and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA<sup>8</sup>; Brazil, 1990). ECA is based on the understanding that adolescents are subjects of rights and in a peculiar developmental situation, which allowed the overcoming, at a rhetorical level, of the punitive logic that was the basis of the Minors Code – previous children's law. From this perspective, ECA proposes to hold adolescents responsible for infractions based on SEMs, which range from warnings to institutionalization in educational facilities. SEMs must be based on socio-pedagogical principles, even if there is a sanctioning character due to the condition of deprivation of liberty (Brazil, 2006). According to these principles, institutionalization should be as brief as possible and applied only in cases of serious infractions or recidivism in less serious infractions.

As a means of promoting the socio-pedagogical objectives of the SEM, SINASE (2006) establishes the socio-educational community as a participatory management device, which includes juvenile offenders and employees of socio-educational assistance programs. The community's role is to operate the processes of deliberation, planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation, and redirection of the actions developed, considering the singularities of the participants. The devices by which the socio-educational community works are multiple and are based on mutual solidarity, i.e., solidarity as an ideal for building an environment that favors autonomy and personal skills to enable the construction of identity and the elaboration of life projects.

For Jimenez and Frassetto (2015), SEMs, although under the principles of ECA and SINASE, present characteristics of disciplinary power, a technology of power that has been present in these institutions since their origin. Their main characteristic is the failed attempt to frame adolescents in an expectation of what would be 'normal' or 'expected'. The ultimate consequence is that there is difficulty in enforcing such expectations. The period of institutionalization is fruitless, as juvenile offenders are expected to provide something they cannot do by not having the necessary resources to access. SEMs end up fulfilling the same social role occupied previously when the Minors Code came into force: a hygienist role that criminalizes and feeds back poverty, racism, and misery.

The construction of SINASE is the result of a dialogue between the state and society, based on Human Rights principles. It focuses on the expansion of social protection and the emancipation of adolescents. However, the challenges in its implementation have been diverse, as the system operates in reality that contradicts its guidelines. For Moreira (2013), SINASE appears as a tool to deal with the violation of rights, recidivism, and low quality of

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<sup>7</sup> The acronym was created in accordance with the Portuguese wording – Sistema Nacional de Atendimento Socioeducativo.

<sup>8</sup> The acronym was created in accordance with the Portuguese wording – Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente.

socio-educational care. However, it is not enough to overcome the institutional practices already in operation since it uses the same strategies of public power that discriminate and criminalize the poor population. Thus, Miranda et al. (2014) point to the challenges of socio-education in guaranteeing the rights of adolescents who comply with SEMs. For the authors, the most significant challenges regarding the promotion, protection, and defense of the rights of adolescents in conflict with the law are the level of social vulnerability, the distance between rights conquered through ECA and SINASE, and the institutional reality of treatment facilities. Still, on the law's proposed challenges, Azevedo, Amorim and Alberto (2017) pointed to the different forms of institutional violence experienced by adolescents in SEM and their subjective consequences. The literature, therefore, indicates that the institutional environment has a negative impact, even though socio-educational laws provide for a positive and pedagogical environment.

Despite the socio-educational community idealized by SINASE, research indicates that interpersonal relationships in treatment facilities are marked by mutual hostility. A survey of teachers from treatment facilities identified that relationships between juvenile offenders were marked by attempts to intimidate them. Due to prohibitions on physical combat, the threats occurred mainly in the discursive plane and from the exchange of looks, which was understood by the researchers as a form of implicit violence (Silva & Ristum, 2010). A survey in the Brazilian states Espírito Santo and Rio Grande do Sul found similar results (Coscioni, Nascimento, Rosa, & Koller, 2020). Participants described a climate of tension that needed to be contained due to the collective objective of keeping the treatment facilities peaceful. In addition to ensuring everyone's physical safety, the reduction of conflicts favored the biannual evaluation of juvenile offenders, directly associated with reducing the time of deprivation of liberty.

Some ethnographic research focused mainly on understanding the norms created among juvenile offenders deprived of liberty. A study in São Paulo (Almeida, 2013) identified that juvenile offenders had negative conceptions about each other, which led them to develop a set of norms to mediate their coexistence. Among these norms, the prohibition during the visitation day of looking at the family member of another inmate, lifting the shirt, keeping the legs spread apart, scratching the private parts, and masturbating stood out. During meals, speaking loudly or swearing was not allowed. In addition, only juvenile offenders who were more 'hygienic' could be responsible for helping to feed the treatment facilities. Participants justified the existence of these norms to guarantee equality among all, which avoided conflicts. Studies carried out in Espírito Santo (Aragão, Margotto, & Batista, 2012; Coscioni et al., 2020) and Rio Grande do Sul (Coscioni et al., 2020) described similar norms. Participants highlighted rules that worked as necessary limits for coexistence among adolescents.

Neri (2011) researched how juvenile offenders classified themselves in two treatment facilities in Rio de Janeiro. At that time, and since before, Rio de Janeiro's criminal organizations (Terceiro Comando, Amigo dos Amigos, and Comando Vermelho) already existed, and many inmates had ties to them even before the SEM. The study described the different socialization forms among the members of the organizations in each of the treatment facilities. In one of the institutions, the inmates could not live with adolescents from rival organizations. This rivalry was present in the hills of Rio de Janeiro, and the juvenile offenders considered it inappropriate to disrespect what was established. However, in the other treatment facilities researched, the adolescents lived together, although allied to rival organizations. For these adolescents, socializing was possible as long as specific rules of coexistence were respected.

The research reviewed generally investigated the experience of juvenile offenders and employees in treatment facilities. The relationships established emerged in the participants' reports or the researchers' observations as a peripheral aspect of the work. Only one of these studies had as its central focus the analysis of interpersonal relationships (Neri, 2011), but its findings were based on the researcher's perspective in her ethnography. Therefore, the objective of this study is to characterize the coexistence between juvenile offenders deprived of liberty from their perspective.

## Method

This research is qualitative, cross-sectional and descriptive, conducted in a male treatment facility in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. The facility is divided into four wards, and data were collected from ten juvenile offenders, all inmates in the same ward. Participants were recruited with the help of an employee of the technical team based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) age between 15 and 20 years, avoiding age discrepancies; and (2) length of stay longer than six months, considering this a reasonable time for bonding with other people. The number of participants was defined based on the expectation of obtaining data saturation with ten adolescents (Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012). The names are fictitious to preserve the participants' identity. The juvenile offenders were between 16 and 18 years old. As self-reported, five were White, two were Brown, and three were Black. All were in elementary school.

An identification form and a semi-structured interview script were used as instruments. The interview script contained 30 open questions divided into three sessions: (1) relationships between juvenile offenders in the treatment facility; (2) the relationship with the one pointed out by the adolescent as the one he dealt with best; and (3) the relationship with the one pointed out by the adolescent as the one he dealt with the worst. When asked to reflect on the relationship with peers, the juvenile offenders were informed that they could include relationships with peers with whom they lived in other treatment facilities.

The research followed the ethical criteria of Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council (Resolução nº 510, 2016). First, it was approved by an Ethics Committee in Research with Human Beings (protocol 51975115.9.0000.5542) and by the president of the Fundação de Atendimento Socioeducativo do Rio Grande do Sul, which is responsible for the SEMs in Rio Grande do Sul. The study's objectives, justification, procedures, and ethical criteria were explained to the juvenile offenders, who signed an assent form (or consent, depending on age). For those under 18, the director of the treatment facility signed the consent forms.

Individual interviews took place in March 2016 with an average duration of 18 minutes, ranging from 12 to 30 minutes. The institution provided a private and comfortable environment for interviews application. With the consent of the juvenile offenders, the interviews were audio-recorded. The interviewer had a background in psychology, is male, was 26 years old, and had had previously interviewed four juvenile offenders in a study on the relationships between them and the technical reference team.

The data were processed from a Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) with the help of the Nvivo 10 software. There was first a period of familiarization with the analysis corpus. The excerpts from the interviews that characterized peer relationships were coded and grouped by semantic similarity. Themes were proposed based on emic criteria and thus emphasized the participants' perspectives. Thematic units were revised until all generated codes were allocated to mutually exclusive categories. Two judges conducted the review

process, working together and resolving differences by consensus. The generated themes were discussed with a third independent judge, who played the supervisor's role. The research team members had no personal or financial interests representing conflicts of interest.

## Results and Discussion

Data analysis generated four themes. The first addresses the presence of 'criminal organizations' in the treatment facility in Porto Alegre, showing its different consequences in the relationships between juvenile offenders. The second theme, 'collective pact', describes the strategies reported to live in the treatment facility and how they avoided conflicting situations. The third theme contrasts with the descriptions of an environment in imminent tension, describing the 'friendship relationships' between some inmates. Finally, 'sexual relations' emerged as the last theme, revealing the occurrence of consensual sexual relations due to the long institutionalization period.

### The Criminal Organizations

The juvenile offenders reported that their relationships were influenced by the power of criminal organizations, which were the starting point for establishing friendship and enmity relationships in the treatment facility. The link to these groups generally occurred before the SEM, so institutionalization was marked by perpetuating previously agreed values. Belonging to an organization seemed to indicate the possibility of support and recognition among peers. Even adolescents who did not have organizational ties sometimes claimed to belong to a group as a means of being recognized.

According to the participants' reports, the power of the organizations reached the point of influencing the logistics of the unit's wards since the socio-educational agents prioritized dividing the adolescents according to belonging to organizations. This was a form of the organization considered effective in controlling conflicts and was also observed in research in other states (Aragão et al., 2012; Neri, 2011; Scisleski, Bruno, Galeano, Santos, & Silva, 2015). This separation criterion is not per those stipulated by ECA (Lei Federal nº 8.069..., 1990), which determines the "[...] strict separation by criteria of age, physical complexion, and seriousness of the infraction" (Art. No. 123, our translation). In addition to being against the law, this organization mode seemed to implement organizations' control in the treatment facility, favoring agreeing with values contrary to those foreseen for the SEM.

Juvenile offenders classified their relationships with peers from the same organization as mutual support, as is evident in Roberto's report (17 years old): "With those from my gang [criminal organization], everything is OK. We take a visit together, we sit together, we talk. One supports the other in here. Nobody allows an enemy gang to come to get one. We help each other, like a family on the street". The highlighted excerpt indicates that the link with the organization generated a feeling of affective belonging, considering that peers from the same organization were compared to family members. The report also shows a protective bond since members of the same organization supported each other in moments of fights. In other reports, participants revealed that adolescents helped each other when one was not visited and, consequently, did not have personal hygiene and *mascação* (foods nicknamed by them, such as stuffed cookies, snacks, etc.).

It can be seen that, from the link with criminal organizations, the juvenile offenders indicated that they had advantages within the institution compared to those who did not have such a previous link. According to Coscioni et al. (2019), the criminal organization represents for adolescents not only material returns but also symbolic ones since it is related to the protection and strengthening of their identity. Thus, the SEM's role in this context should be questioned since it seems to foster such a reference, with possible reflections on the lives of adolescents after institutionalization. Criticism can also be extended to preventive social policies that should have acted before the involvement in the crime. The 'world of crime' will continue to welcome many young people abandoned by misery and marginalization as long as the State alternates between the role of omission and punishment.

Living with adolescents from rival organizations, on the other hand, was characterized as hostile. It occurred especially among those who already had disagreements prior to the SEM. In the account of one of the juvenile offenders interviewed, it is possible to perceive the difficulties of coexistence between members from rival organizations, the so-called *contras* (against, in Portuguese):

The guys live with the 'contras', more than with the guys you don't get along on the street. Here I don't get along with the guy, and I have to live with him, in the classroom, the course, the hallway, the courtyard. Not very good, right? I don't like being around a person I don't like (Lucas, 17 years old).

Tension seemed to occur in the exchange of glances, which can be understood as a form of implicit violence (Silva & Ristum, 2010). The adolescents chose to keep their distance from peers from rival organizations, which reflected the logic outside the treatment facility: "It's no use, my organization doesn't get along with the guy there, and I laugh with the guy. When I go out on the street, the guys from my organization will already have their faces turned to me too" (Roberto, 17 years old). The rivalry reached the point where the adolescents avoided the bond, considering that in the future, they could face each other in an armed conflict:

Ah, if I met them and I had a gun, they came against me, I would kill them, right? I wouldn't give them an easy time [...]. Those boys, they told me, 'do it right there, and if you screw up on the street, we'll see what happens', right? Then I was going to make their mother cry before mine, right? (José, 16 years old).

Institutionalization not only favors the perpetuation of relationships between members of the same organization but also increases exposure to violence and the risk of further conflicts with eventual death in the so-called 'trafficking wars'. SEM, therefore, seems to act more as a risk factor than a protective factor for infraction behavior. This reality is contradictory in light of the principles established by ECA and SINASE, which corroborates the understanding that the Brazilian socio-educational system has strong characteristics of disciplinary power and social hygiene (Jimenez & Frassetto, 2015).

The presence of criminal organizations seems to insert its logic and makes it challenging to fulfill the objectives foreseen for the SEM. The affiliation of adolescents in SEM to organizations is associated with the possibility of accessing consumer goods and a kind of bond placing them in the relationship with the world around them, their community, and among their peers (Coscioni et al., 2019; Pessoa et al., 2017). In the context of SEM, criminal organizations seem to create a split between the inmates to provide a climate from which the 'life of crime' is invested (Neri, 2011). The very structure of the treatment facility investigated favored the strengthening of criminal organizations due to the dormitory allocation of juvenile offenders according to their belonging to organizations.

Therefore, the socio-educational system generates a paradox, given that institutionalization provides greater bonding with delinquent peers. An adolescent may enter the treatment facility without organization affiliation but leave having deep ties. The SEM becomes what is popularly known as the 'school of crime': the institutionalization period configured as a period of learning and connection with the 'world of crime'.

### The Pact of Collectiveness

The juvenile offenders considered that the main rule for socializing among them was 'respect' and 'humbleness'. However, what adolescents understand by respect is not related to positive regard for the other but instead avoiding 'unnecessary' contacts. Considering that several juvenile offenders had rivalries, the notion of respect was based on an attempt to protect the limits of a tolerable coexistence, to avoid conflicts that could harm the reassessment of the SEM and the consequent increase in institutionalization time. Thus, the respect mentioned by them represents much more consideration for themselves than for the other.

Humbleness was understood as an ideal attitude towards the group, characterized as absent envy and acceptance of the rules. According to them, such behavior was a means of avoiding conflicts, which increased the possibility of reassessing the SEM. Both the respect and the humbleness mentioned by the participants indicate a mindset in which there is the idea of a collective with equal rights and duties, which is also observed in research in other states (Almeida, 2013; Aragão et al., 2012; Coscioni et al., 2020; Neri, 2011). Thus, some personal characteristics were undesirable, such as arrogance, hubris, and aggressiveness: "Here, the guys eat the same food, watch the same movie. They are the same, there is nothing different" (Roberto, 16 years old).

Participants reported that some juvenile offenders in the initial periods of institutionalization have difficulties understanding respect between peers, which participants understood as 'childishness'. A similar situation was found in a study in Rio de Janeiro (Neri, 2011), which described the existence of a specific category used by them: 'comedies'. These adolescents were disrespectful to those interned for a longer time and prevented the tranquility of the accommodations by provoking the other inmates. The juvenile offenders in the research mentioned above and those interviewed in the research reported here understood that fights were undesirable for adolescents in SEM for a longer time. Faced with such a situation, older juvenile offenders 'needed to impose respect' through their rules. In Diogo's words (16 years old), a participant in the research reported here, it is possible to understand the differentiation between those who were arriving compared to those who had been in the treatment facility for longer:

There are those arriving now and then want to mess up, fight, curse. They don't even know the guy's been here for a long time. Those still haven't learned anything on the street, got here, and know nothing. However, the good news is that the elders are teaching respect. To have respect for your pals, with the girls, socialize here with every one, take nothing from others, and mess with nothing from others (Diogo, 16 years old).

Strategies were reported to prevent conflicts from occurring, as this could lead to reprisals that would jeopardize the reassessment of the SEM and consequently increase the length of stay. Therefore, the adolescents understood that disagreements prior to compliance with the SEM should be resolved 'outside the treatment facility'. The findings are similar to previous studies (Neri, 2011; Silva & Ristum, 2010), which reported threats,



primarily discursive. The presence of confrontation only at a veiled level avoided complications with the direction of the treatment facility and with the Judiciary:

If he were taking a shower, I would wait a while before getting in because it was one after another. It felt like bullying, so I avoided it. I was only afraid that we would come to blows, but thank God he followed his path before it happened and jeopardized my stay (Bernardo, 18 years old).

Although avoided, the participants reported the occurrence of physical violence, whose outcome had consequences for the juvenile offenders involved and for the ward as a whole:

Here we only lose by fighting instead of only winning against the monitors [socio-educational agents]. It was supposed to have a carnival party, then the girls from CASEF [a treatment for female adolescents] would come, but then because of our fights, they cut it. They cut parties, they cut capoeira classes, we lost the patio, we just lost (Jeferson, 17 years old).

The adolescent's report considers sanctions to be avoided, as they served as punishment and had consequences that led the inmate to stay longer in the treatment facility. The suspension of leisure activities as a means of control is typical in the socio-educational system (Lazaretti-da-Conceição & Cammarosano-Onofre, 2013), mainly based on a coercive logic that disregards leisure practices as legitimate rights of adolescents deprived of freedom. A similar situation was observed in a study conducted in Rio Grande do Sul and Espírito Santo (Coscioni et al., 2020). Their participants revealed that the coexistence between juvenile offenders from different criminal organizations occurred peacefully. Everyone tried to avoid punishments that could compromise all adolescents in the units.

This collective thinking can be seen, at first glance, as something positive, given that it reveals a form of respect among them. However, similar to the first theme generated, a critical analysis of such a collectivity reveals the naturalization of violence and the social norms between criminal organizations. The objective of keeping the peace in the treatment facility only met the requirement of anticipating the end of the institutionalization period. The patterns of implicit violence were maintained, and future intentions to materialize conflicts that could not be promptly carried out.

Despite the notion of collectivity expressed in the juvenile offenders' discourse, there was a dispute over power among the inmates in the treatment facility. Some were more respected than others. In their perception, having respect was also directly linked to the possession of certain material goods, such as a team jersey, sneakers, caps, and even drugs. Participants also reported a kind of barter of these items between the inmates, establishing a form of power between them:

For example, adolescent A fights with adolescent B. A gets drugs. B doesn't get drugs, and he can't receive visits. Adolescent A maybe has it from time to time. It turns out that adolescents C, D, E, F, G, everyone will run after adolescent B. EVERYONE will charge because A gets drugs. So, this issue of having drugs becomes sovereignty, it's complicated (Alexandre, 18 years old).

Alexandre's speech indicates an interest in power in the treatment facility, related to who should be better considered and more protected before the collective. Different studies in treatment facilities in the country reported the presence of hierarchy among the inmates, which worked to generate inequalities in their relationships (Almeida, 2013; Aragão et al., 2012; Neri, 2011; Silva & Ristum, 2010). Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight the natural way the adolescent reveals drugs getting into the institution, framing the institutionalization period as a risk factor for the offending behavior and the consumption of psychotropic substances.

Respect was understood as something mandatory but in dispute. The hierarchies created among the juvenile offenders reflected imprisonment policy, i.e., the other is seen as an enemy. Consequently, protection mechanisms against such danger were necessary, which resulted in this 'collective pact'. Almeida (2013) claims that these forms of regulation among inmates are a recurrent practice in the internal organization of prison institutions, characterized by demands and a common feeling of legitimacy. Such rules seem to have been created by the inmates themselves to control the violence that the state was unable to contain, which again evokes state negligence towards such institutions.

The collectivity expressed by the juvenile offenders does not seem to be based on a notion of the solidary community since hierarchies existed and generated inequalities. The collectivity of treatment facilities exists, above all, to avoid possible chaos that would generate difficulties for everyone. A treatment facility taken by conflict can mean bad reassessments and consequent institutionalization time. In the name of the good of 'everyone', mutual agreements must exist.

### Friendship Relations

The juvenile offenders described a relationship of friendship, mutual trust, and intimacy with the inmates with whom they shared the dormitory. Many friendship cases also occurred between those who knew each other before the SEM. The ease of dialogue characterized the formed friendship, the main subjects being: the daily life of the treatment facility, the territory where they lived, the previous events of their lives, parties, women, and drugs. The pair was considered someone who facilitated the fulfillment of the SEM since they felt more comfortable in their presence:

I think he felt good, but it was a balance, you know? It was a moment of happiness and a moment of sadness. I felt happy for a moment talking to him. We forgot about the crime, forgot about all that. But I felt sad when I woke up to reality (Bernardo, 18 years old).

The recurring existence of reports such as Bernardo's expands understanding of adolescents' relationships in SEM, characterized in previous studies by processes of mutual hostility (Coscioni et al., 2020; Silva & Ristum, 2010). The participants revealed, on the contrary, a set of 'brotherhoods', favoring a process of maturation and driving aspirations far from criminality. For Jorge (17 years old), this type of relationship helped him to think about alternatives for another possible life, in which the 'life of crime' was no longer the first option:

Before I was very different, I didn't respect anyone, I didn't care. Then he started giving me advice that I should stop because otherwise, my mother would get bad too. There was an effect that was that we get along well here. Every time I kind of want to mess everything, he says, 'no, bro, don't mess with your life way, it's not worth it, you have to leave, your mother needs you' (Jorge, 17 years old).

It can be seen from the juvenile offenders' reports that the relationships with their peer friends fostered a direct and horizontal relationship, in which there was a kind of mutual trust. Such sincerity seemed to enable an exchange where there was no need to affirm collectively shared content. The daily coexistence in the dormitory provided a space to question themselves about their realities and expose insecurity about the future. In the collective, expressions of doubt were avoided, and many maintained their relationships mediated by the organizations. In the context of more intimate relationships, they allowed themselves to reveal divergent contents to the collective. If the intention to break with crime was conceived as a weakness and, consequently, only shared with the closest peers, this theme also corroborates the content of the previous ones. In other words, institutionalization disfavors

the perpetuation of values different from the logic of the 'world of crime' and, therefore, can be understood as a risk factor for delinquent behavior.

Participants also indicated the existence of friendships that negatively influenced them, accompanying them in attitudes that generated problems with socio-educational agents. This relationship generated moments considered fun, and the peers seemed to be the one with whom the adolescent identified, pointing out similarities between them. Some peers influenced to fight and consume illicit drugs together inside the dormitory. These same juvenile offenders claimed to have learned from their partner about crime and pragmatically about the treatment facility's rules. They also shared plans for the future to continue in the 'life of crime' and moments marked by the perpetuation of illicit activities, even within the treatment facility:

Once, we were in the same dorm, and some marijuana had come to the boys. And then we wanted to smoke, and there was no way to light it. Then we borrowed several mp3's, right? We blew up the mp3 so it could catch fire, and we could smoke weed (laughs). We took it and ripped the battery, and we made all three catch on fire, then smoked the weed and started traveling. Then we had to throw them away, huh? We had to tell the kids we had broken them, they got mad, but you can't go back, right? It's gone, we broke it, we only support them later (José, 16 years old).

The excerpt above again reveals different aspects of the appreciation of delinquent behavior among juvenile offenders, from the entry of drugs into the institution to the understanding that violating norms is fun. Thus, it is worth emphasizing the importance of peers in constructing values and identity (Brown & Klute, 2003). By bringing together adolescents with shared values, it is hoped that these values will be perpetuated and reinforced. What can be inferred then is that the SEM seems more effective in perpetuating values among peers involved with the world of crime than new values per the socio-educational community intended by SINASE.

## Sexual Relations

The occurrence of consensual sexual relations among the inmates was reported. This theme was brought up by an interviewee who claimed that a homosexual internal adolescent opened the possibility for situations like this to occur. For him, the main reason was the long period of institutionalization, so that some juvenile offenders saw in the homosexual adolescent someone to satisfy their sexual desires. The sexual right concerns the autonomy of the person concerning matters of his body, the right to equality and bodily integrity, and the right to health (Mattar, 2008). Although ECA and SINASE mention the right to personal visits to adolescents in treatment facilities, they are silent on how to deal with the exercise of sexuality among inmates. Furthermore, the very occurrence of conjugal visits does not occur per the provisions of the law (Mattar, 2008; Peres et al., 2002). In the facility where the survey occurred, visits by girlfriends were allowed, but there was no space for intimate visits.

The participant reported that sexual relations took place in secrecy, without using a condom and those homosexual adolescents suffered prejudice – they were avoided and the targets of disrespectful jokes. In a study carried out in the Northeast region (Mattar, 2008), a similar situation occurred: an openly homosexual adolescent with whom other adolescents had sex without the employees being aware. A study in São Paulo (Peres et al., 2002) also identified sexual relations within the treatment facility, highlighting the importance of using condoms to avoid contagion by sexually transmitted infections.

The SEM must have, above all, an educational character so that talking about sexual health and the sexual relations that occur between inmates is essential to avoid violence and health problems. Further investigation into such meetings in treatment facilities in Porto Alegre and other regions of Brazil is warranted. Workgroups, research, and interventions should be designed and carried out to discuss the exercise of sexuality during the period of institutionalization. It is also important to warn about the use of condoms and other precautions, especially as Porto Alegre is considered the Brazilian capital with the highest rate of HIV infection – with more than twice the rates of the state itself and almost triple the rates in the country (Dartora, Anflor, & Silveira, 2017). Also, sexual health is a fundamental topic to be discussed in the socio-educational system to educate about sexual relationships, gender issues, and sexual orientation. Institutionalization is not a place of oppression and silencing of non-heterosexual orientation adolescents.

## Final Considerations

This research aimed to characterize the interaction between juvenile offenders in treatment facilities from their perspective themselves. To this end, semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten juvenile offenders from a treatment facility in Porto Alegre. Future research with employees and family members may contribute to understanding such relationships from the perspective of adults. Longitudinal studies can elucidate how such relationships are established in SEM.

The interviews conducted were based on a thematic analysis that generated four themes of an emic nature, namely: (1) criminal organizations, (2) the collective pact, (3) friendships, and (4) sexual relationships. The theme of criminal organizations addresses how the inmates were organized within the treatment facility. Many adolescents had links with some criminal organization and, in the treatment facility, such ties tended to intensify due to daily living. The collective pact addresses the rules that adolescents have established so that fights motivated by prior institutionalization would not become every day. The existence of rules of behavior and a hierarchy supported by the inmates were factors that favored an idea of collectivity among inmates. Friendship is a topic that stands out among other findings in the national literature, as it describes the occurrence of positive relationships between peers. Such relationships appear as a source of social support, enabling the adolescent to project himself into the future based on his friend's life project. On the other hand, there were also reports of friendships favoring the perpetuation of relations with the world of crime. Finally, the last theme reveals sexual relations between adolescents consensually, secretly, and without condoms.

Therefore, the results reveal that the daily relationships established by the adolescents during institutionalization seem to undermine the SEM's objective of promoting new possibilities of life far from criminality. By submitting adolescents who have in common values agreed with the 'world of crime', the SEM favors the perpetuation of the infraction conduct from what is popularly known as the 'school of crime'. The prevalence of a hostile interpersonal environment marked by implicit and explicit violence also undermines the objective of promoting development so that institutionalization becomes, above all, a period marked by suffering. The solidarity community idealized by SINASE is still a distant reality, replaced by the values of criminal organizations that are strengthened from the uninterrupted coexistence of idle adolescents in an institution with precarious human and material resources.

A critical and attentive attitude to the contexts in which adolescents are inserted must operate the SEM from the perspective of the ECA and SINASE, during, before, and after institutionalization. As long as the responsibility for infringing behavior is attributed only to the individual, we will not have reached the responsibility of society and state, provided for by SINASE, concerning adolescents in conflict with the law. Preventive social policies in line with the socio-educational system must put a proper system of guaranteeing rights. This system must be sensitive to the context of misery and marginalization as a risk to involvement with crime. Only in this way can the SEM advance from a disciplinary and hygienist logic to a de facto socio-educational logic. As long as the institutionalization of adolescents remains a risk factor for criminality, the adjective socio-educational attached to the measure must be understood only as a rhetorical change.

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