

## Guardianship Councilors' views on the effectiveness of the existing network in providing full protection to children and teenagers in situations of sexual violence

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**Abstract** *This article aimed to ascertain the point of view of Guardianship Councilors about the main difficulties of operation and mobilization faced by the Guardianship Councils network in ensuring full protection to children and teenagers in a situation of sexual abuse and exploitation in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. The qualitative study, based on thematic analysis of 12 interviews (with individuals and as focus groups), reconstituted the scenario reported by the Councilors and the limitations that they experienced on their sphere of activity. The results indicate the following problems perceived: (i) insufficiency of institutions for specialized care; (ii) professionals without the necessary training/experience; (iii) delays; and (iv) lack of communication and coordination between institutions able to ensure the necessary protection measures for the cases concerned.*

**Key words** *Sexual violence, Guardianship Council, Children and teenagers*

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## Introduction

In dealing with the multiple forms of violence, the World Health Organization highlights the great impact that sexual violence has on the physical and mental health of children and teenagers, leaving profound marks and damaging their development. The experience of abuse and of sexual exploitation can leave its victims with sexually transmitted diseases, psychiatric disturbances, suicidal behavior and low self-esteem<sup>1,2</sup>.

Sexual violence to children and teenagers takes place in many forms and there are many concepts of it. The concept of sexual abuse is defined by the Brazilian Health Ministry as the practice of sexual acts or games in which the adult uses the child or teenager, through 'grooming', physical violence, or threat, for his or her own sexual pleasure, either with or without physical contact. It can be committed by members of the family (by blood, or by marriage), or by strangers. It can also be practiced by older adolescents<sup>1,2</sup>.

Another expression of sexual violence against children and teenagers is sexual exploitation. Commercial sexual exploitation is defined by the literature as a practice that aims to obtain profit or benefit from commercial transactions involving the bodies of children or teenagers for sexual purposes<sup>3</sup>. It usually involves various agents, including intermediaries (people and institutions), people practicing grooming (family members or otherwise), exploiters, and clients. It can take place through an organized network, or be kept exclusively within a universe of relationships of friendship or family relationship<sup>4</sup>.

The sex market can attract both male and female adolescents, from various economic or social levels, levels of schooling and family environments. Many children and adolescents seek this practice as a way of earning money, either aiming to minimize the situation of exclusion that they live in, or to gain independence from the family, or even to have access to consumer goods and services that will give them a feeling of social belonging.

The scale of these situations is not well known, but even though it is under-notified, it is, in Brazil, large. In the period 2003 through 2010, the Children and Teenagers Module of the Human Rights Line ('Dial 100') reported 7,782 accusations of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Brazilian capital cities: 1,143 in the Northern Region; 3,491 in the Northeastern Region; 707 in the Center-West, including

Brasilia (Brazil's capital, with 44 reports); 1,702 in the Southeast; and 695 in the capital cities of the Southern Region. (Source: *Dial 100*, Human Rights Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, 2011). The total number of acts of sexual violence committed against children and adolescents identified by the Brazilian health services in the period 2009 through 2013 shows a much larger scale (48,906 cases)<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, sexual violence, as well as being a public health problem, constitutes a violation of rights, including sexual rights that include liberty, autonomy and responsible exercise of sexuality<sup>6</sup>. In this aspect, the sexual rights of children, and the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents, are now seen through a new prism, without leaving aside the protection that they deserve because they are at a particular stage of development. The coordination of these two fields of rights has the particularity of confronting different ideological agendas, that of liberty (sexual rights) and that of protection and guardianship (full protection of children and adolescents)<sup>7</sup>. As authors of studies have indicated, in relation to these rights there are many taboos and prejudices, calling for investment and debate for them to be recognized and respected<sup>8</sup>.

This situation immediately raises questions about the forms of protection of these children and adolescents, and the effectiveness of the mechanisms of restitution of their rights.

With the enactment of Law 8069<sup>9</sup>, which instituted the Children's and Adolescents' Law (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, or ECA), the principles of full protection and absolute priority establish a radical social framework affirming the responsibility of the State, of families and of society in guaranteeing the rights of all children and adolescents, whatever situation they find themselves in<sup>10</sup>. As part of the change of the institutional action aiming to guarantee full protection, based on the ECA, the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents created the System of Guarantee of Children's and Adolescents' Rights (*Sistema de Garantia de Direitos de Crianças e Adolescentes*, or SGDCA).

The SGDCA is organized in three elements: Promotion of rights, social supervision, and defense of rights. The element of promotion of rights includes the basic political rights of the population of children and adolescents, and of their families. The social supervision activity deals with the participation of society in the formulation and monitoring of policies made for children and adolescents, through the ac-

tion of civil society organizations or through the formal instances of participation established by law, which are the Rights Councils (*Conselhos dos Direitos*). And finally, the defense of rights element comprises vigilance and activity for compliance with the rights of children and adolescents, through interventions where and when there is a threat to or violation of those rights. The Guardianship Council (*Conselho Tutelar*, or CT) operates especially in this activity, together with other instances of the power of public authority and of civil society, such as the Children's and Adolescents' Courts (*Justiça da Infância. Justiça da Juventude*), the Public Attorneys' Offices (*Ministério Público*), the Public Defender's Office (*Defensoria Pública*), the Public Safety Departments (*Secretarias de Segurança Pública*) and the Centers for Defense of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, and of Human Rights<sup>11</sup>.

The Guardianship Council has a strategic role in the composition and functioning of the SGDCA, acting as a mediator between the mechanisms of the State and the demands created by violation of rights. It acts as the principal mobilizer of the network of services. Its legal conception can be found in Article 131 of the ECA, which provides for its identity as a permanent and autonomous body, non-judicial, made responsible, by society, for vigilance and supervision for compliance with the rights of children and adolescents, as defined in that Law<sup>9</sup>.

However, the action of this mechanism raises a series of questions. On the one hand, it is indisputable that the Guardianship Councils exercise an essential role in the action of restitution of rights, while on the other hand, studies carried out to date indicate a trend about which there appears to be a consensus, which can be described as: (i) precarious supply of material and human resources; (ii) lack of training, experience or skills of many Councilors for carrying out their functions; (iii) scarcity of services for referral, because of an absence of community or official programs in support of families, children or adolescents, and inability of those that exist to meet all the demands; and (iv) lack of knowledge in relation to the role of the Guardianship Councils<sup>12-14</sup>.

The Guardianship Councilor operates in a social context of inequalities, conflicts, ineffectiveness of public policies, loss of social rights, and scarcity of services. This context demands from this professional the capacity to mobilize the formal and informal social networks of protection of children's and adolescents' rights to provide articulated responses to the real needs

of the population of children and teenagers, to a level corresponding to the regulatory framework laid down in the ECA.

The concept of *social network* was the point of departure for this work. This concept was defined, based on the work of Castells<sup>15</sup>, as the sharing of human and material power and resources of a formal or informal social group, of agents, groups and institutions, in a given territory. These are social fabrics that organize themselves around common objectives and focuses of action, the web of which is constructed in a process of collective participation and shared responsibilities, assumed by each one and by all the participants.

In networks, by this definition, decisions are taken and conflicts resolved, seeking minimum consensus agreements that ensure joint actions<sup>16</sup>.

Looking now at aim of this study, the category of *network for confronting violence* was aligned as 'operator' of the analysis. A reference was taken from the definition by the Women's Policies Secretariat<sup>17</sup> which defines the concept as: 'articulated activity between the institutions and services of government, NGOs and the community, aiming to develop effective strategies of prevention, and policies that ensure empowerment of people in a situation of violence, and their human rights; to make aggressors accountable; and to provide qualified care and assistance'. A component of the *network for confrontation* is a network of service, that is to say, the group of actions and services of various sectors (especially social assistance, the courts, the public safety departments and the health services) which, even though they have different identities, all have as their purpose the production of integrated, quality and humanized care/service.

In this sense, the *confrontation networks* come close to the concept of *policy networks* and the proposal that this concept represents. *Policy networks* are inter-organizational arrangements for cooperative execution of public policies the execution structures of which are polycentric and interdependent<sup>18</sup>.

The network of protection of children and teenagers is defined as an articulated group of actors and governmental and non-governmental organizations, with the objective of guaranteeing the general or specific rights of a portion of the population of children and teenagers<sup>20</sup>.

However, in spite of the strategic role of mobilizing the protection networks that is attributed to the Guardianship Councils, their activity and their relationship with the agents of the SGDCA

in relation to cases of sexual violence has not yet been sufficiently studied<sup>13</sup>.

In this article an effort has been made to analyze, from the point of view of Guardianship Councilors, the main problems that they experience in operating in the context of a network, while aiming to achieve full protection of children and adolescents in a situation of sexual abuse or exploitation.

## Methodology

This is a qualitative study, conducted on the basis of analysis of content by theme subject<sup>20,21</sup>. The aim was to establish a reading of the actions of these individuals taking the meanings and intentions attributed by them as a starting point, and in light of the context of the social relations<sup>22</sup> of which they are a part in the scenario of the SGD-CA.

The municipality of Rio de Janeiro was chosen for this study for several reasons: It is Brazil's second largest state capital, with the highest population density; it has a vast and complex care network; it is one of the capitals with the largest number of Councils (12); and it has a high level of sexual violence against children<sup>5</sup>.

The fieldwork involved the 12 Guardianship Councils existing in the municipality, over the period from June 2012 to March 2013. In some cases, several prior contacts were made before each interview, aiming to create a link of confidence. In spite of the interest in taking part in the study, an effect of the enormous demand for attendance at the Guardianship Councils, and the distance between them, was that several interviews were rescheduled numerous times.

Data was collected by submitting each of the pairs of Councilors to two interviews. The focus group technique, applied in two Councils, was a means of requesting teams to require that all their members should build a consideration together. In these situations the same interview routine was applied. 30 Guardianship Councilors took part in the study.

The script consisted of semi-structured questions focusing on the procedures adopted by a Guardianship Council when it receives a notification of suspected or confirmed cases of sexual abuse or exploitation; the services available for referral in the care network; the obstacles to operation of the Council; the effectiveness of the care network; and narratives of experiences of care.

In the pre-analysis phase, the testimonies of the subjects were transcribed in full, allowing them to be read through in full as a collection. The second phase, of classification, consisted of detailed analysis of the materials selected, and codification of the data based on subject units, making possible a description of the characteristics that related to manifest and latent contents<sup>21</sup>.

The next stage was categorization by subject<sup>20</sup>. Material was grouped by centers of meaning, taking as a reference the similarity of meanings present in the speeches of the subjects. The elements were classified according to their similarities, and the differentiations between them, and they were re-grouped by common characteristics. And finally the results were processed to establish inference, and interpretation.

Quotes from speech of the participants, in the text below, are identified by the number of the interview, to maintain anonymity.

The analysis brings together the many and controversial perceptions and statements by the Guardianship Councilors about the protection that is in fact provided by the activity of the formal (institutionalized) network that comprises the SGDCA. The analysis was organized based on core subjects that emerged from the collection of information: (1) insufficiency of the existing services network; (2) references for referrals of children, adolescents and their families; (3) problems of communication and coordination in the care network; and (4) coordination and articulation of activity with the agents responsible for apportioning legal accountability of the perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation.

The ethical aspects in relation to research with human beings were obeyed, and the project was approved by a Research Ethics Committee.

## Results and discussion

### Shortcomings of the network

The Children's and Adolescents' Law, when laying down a policy designed to fully protect children, sets out that care should be organized through: Basic social policies; social assistance policies and programs of a supplementary nature, for those who need them; and special services of medical and psychosocial prevention and care for the victims of negligence, ill treatment, exploitation, abuse, cruelty and oppression<sup>9</sup>.

The point of view of work to protect and promote the interests of children and adoles-

cents involves multiple sectors, both in the macro-structural aspects (the policies), and also in the internal coordination for mobilization of interventions. The multiplicity of mechanisms that interfere positively and/or negatively in appropriate growth, development and social integration of children and adolescents calls for inter-institutional and inter-personal interaction, made more powerful by work in a network<sup>23</sup>.

Legitimizing this logic of articulation and coordination almost always demands an intense and continuous movement to integrate the various institutions that comprise the network. This is a complex process that requires articulation of wills/intentions, permanent dialog between the actors, seeking out of partners, and permanent skill acquisition and training for the collective and inter-sectorial work.

However, in the territory in which the Guardianship Councilors services are often precarious and/or scarce. And by focusing on the perception of one of the most important agents of the SGDCA about the protection network for children and adolescents, it is possible to identify the problems faced in ensuring that the rights of children and adolescents are protected.

Through the unanimous verbal statements of the Councilors, it was identified that the composition of the network of services for dealing with cases of sexual abuse and exploitation is insufficient and precarious, and that this has the effect of impeding efficacious care, and taking of action:

[...] *The shortage of resources – the shortage of services... Sometimes, there is the service itself, but there are no resources, there just aren't any. For example, we have many institutions that serve children and adolescents that are victims of abuse and exploitation, but they don't have a complete team, you see? They don't have a complete team – and that makes things very difficult. The network, it doesn't succeed in providing the complete care [...]* (Testimony 03).

[...] *I think there's a lot lacking. Well, that's my opinion, you see. I think there should be more [services]* (Testimony 08).

These statements reveal that the way the network works is far from executing its function – which is to ensure full protection of children and adolescents, through the supply and guarantee of specialized services by professionals that are properly trained and have the skills for intervention and confronting situations of sexual violence against children and adolescents.

On this point, the Councilors indicate that the principal problems in the network for con-

fronting violence are: (i) sloth of the system of defense and accountability (Public Safety department, Public Attorneys, and the Courts); (ii) insufficiency of the social-assistance and educational policies; (iii) scarcity and, indeed, absence of various fundamental services and actions, especially those of mental health; and (iv) the low number of professionals that operate in the organizations and services. They cited innumerable cases in which such gaps had become evident, revealing a dense field of experiences.

It is observed that the Councilors, faced with this situation of fragile supply and low coordination between actions and services, present an evaluation of the network that oscillates between bitter resignation in the face of the status quo, and refusal to accept the situation, sustained by affirmation of the principles that guide their function in the re-establishment and defense of rights.

[...] *The partners are, in this order: Secabex [the previous service, now provided under the aegis of the PAEFI in the CREAS], DCAV [police stations for infant and adolescent victims] and the Public Prosecutors. And with all this, does it function the way we'd like it to? No. Does it serve the way we would like it to? No. But it's what we've got [...]* (Testimony 12).

[...] *we can't say here that [the network] doesn't have what it takes, it's just lame, it plays its part to the extent of the possible, because otherwise the Councils themselves would be closed – I wouldn't be here. The fact is, though, that the network itself still does very little, it could do much more - that's the truth, but [...]* (Testimony 11).

### The institutions that are respected

The Guardianship Councilors unanimously said that the only institutions existing in the municipalities that have the expertise to serve and care for children and adolescents in a situation of sexual abuse and exploitation and their families are the Specialized Social Assistance Referral Centers (*Centros de Referência Especializado de Assistência Social* – or CREAS), and the non-governmental organization NACA (*Núcleo de Atenção a Criança e ao Adolescente* – Children's and Adolescents' Care Center).

[...] *We used to have the Leila Diniz Center, which was part of Secabex. It worked a lot with us, on an occasional one-off basis: every 15 days we had a meeting for a case study, things went faster and today we have the CREAS. Except that what we finished up doing was referring cases only to NACA [...]* (Testimony 11).

There was clear dissatisfaction with the eradication of Secabex (*Serviço de Enfrentamento à Violência, ao Abuso e à Exploração Sexual Contra Crianças e Adolescentes* – service confronting sexual violence, abuse and exploitation against children and adolescents) – a service that had previously been offered under the aegis of the CREAS.

The *Sentinela* (Sentinel) Program, created by the former State Social Assistance Department and the Social Security and Assistance Ministry, emerged in 2002, in response to the debate created by approval of the National Plan to Confront Sexual Violence against Children and Young People, which aimed to guarantee integrated and specialized care for children and adolescents in situations of sexual violence<sup>24</sup>. With the implementation of the Unified Social Assistance System, the Sentinel program was eradicated and the offer of care for children and adolescents in situations of sexual violence was transferred to the units of the CREAS, obeying the Operational Rules of the Social Assistance Policy, with the name Secabex. However, with the approval of the National Social Assistance Services Classification<sup>25</sup>, the PAEFI was created – the *Service for Specialized Protection and Care for Families and Individuals (Serviço de Proteção e Atenção Especializado a Famílias e Indivíduos)*, and action to provide care in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation became the normal responsibility of any CREAS.

If one takes the specification laid down by the Social Development Ministry of one CREAS for each 200,000 people, then to serve an estimated population of 6,429,922, in 2013, there should be 23 more Special Protection Facilities in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, in addition to the nine that currently exist<sup>26</sup>.

Comments by Councilors reiterate the insufficiency of the social-assistance facilities that are accessible for the users:

[...] *Yes, I think (that the network is precarious) because if you look at the quantity, previously it was already precarious, and now it's even worse, more precarious, it's not every area that has one [a CREAS], and when it has one, it's not actually providing any service [...]* (Testimony 06).

This calls into question the effectiveness of the care provided in the CREAS. since the group of functions attributed to it is extremely wide. The CREAS are responsible for: offering services to confront sexual violence, abuse and exploitation against children and adolescents; services of orientation of accompaniment for adolescents in complying with the social-educational role on an

open basis; and attendance to situations of risk and violation of rights of children and adolescents. Further, they also cover other situations of risk or violation of rights in relation to elderly people, the disabled, women victims of violence, the homeless, and others.

Paradoxically, in a project carried out with five CREAS of Rio de Janeiro municipality, Pacheco<sup>27</sup> identified that sexual violence against children and adolescents, more specifically sexual exploitation, is not included in the demands attributed to the CREAS, and the cases of sexual violence that are attended are not treated in their specific characteristics. The study also found that the acceptance and monitoring of cases, and the articulation in network, were embryonic and confused in daily practice, and that there was a lack of training for the professionals.

The Councilors also said that the NGO NACA is an important partner in attending children and adolescents in a situation of sexual abuse and exploitation. Specifically, in Rio de Janeiro since 2001 the executive coordination of this service has been the responsibility of the Infancy and Adolescence Foundation (FIA), a body of the indirect administration of the State Government, linked to the State Social Assistance Department, which has the objective of collaborating in the formulation of public policies to guarantee rights in the area of childhood and adolescence, and put in place and organize special social protection services and actions.

The stated objective of NACA is to carry out care for children and adolescents that are victims of family violence. It has multi-professional teams, comprising social assistance, psychologists and lawyers, specialized in the subject, who work with the family to stop the situation of violence and avoid its repetition.

Until 2013, NACA was the only institution in the municipality with the expertise to do the work of revealing sexual abuse with children, serving all the referrals made by the network of protection for children and adolescents, and also the spontaneous demands, generating an inevitable delay in serving the cases:

[...] *NACA, when we refer a family to NACA, we send a report, and the family has to wait for a contact from the NACA, then they will schedule their action – we have one that we submitted a month ago, and it is scheduled for only 20 days from now – so that's not a thing that's immediate because there are other children waiting in line. So we think that this is insufficient because in this situation you have to be very fast [...]* (Testimony 07).

This evidence calls for a note of caution: on the one hand, it can be said that the NGOs are indispensable in view of the expertise that many of them have and the scarcity of public authority institutions that dedicate themselves to this type of work; but on the other hand, exclusive delegation of service to the NGO can work in favor of simply relieving the State of responsibility, and also generate problems of continuity in the event of change of management<sup>28</sup>.

Another important point to be noted is that none of the Councilors made any remarks about carrying out any work jointly with the sectors of Health and Education in response to cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents.

This distancing invites questioning on the possibilities of these partnerships. Authors such as Sanchez and Minayo<sup>29</sup> emphasize that although the health sector is one of the most active defenders of full protection of children and adolescents, in practice the focus of attention continues to be on the most serious cases, with care being given predominantly to the effects of violence consisting of repair of physical traumas and injuries in the emergency service; and to care for recovery and rehabilitation from after-effects of the hospital environment; and in diagnosis of ill-treatment in the medical-legal aspects.

In relation to education, the school does indeed have a preponderant role both in prevention and in identification and notification of cases of sexual violence. However, it is still only a few schools that carry out specific actions for confronting sexual violence and work with the issue of sexual rights<sup>30</sup>.

The distancing of these important sectors that are participants in the SGDCA, and which are pillars of the networks of public policy for the population of children and adolescents, is a fact that continues to merit the attention of governments and the forums that discuss rights.

### **Problems of communication and articulation in the care network**

Due to the nature of their work, it is not possible to consider the activity of the Guardianship Council without mentioning the importance of the process of communication to coordinate between the actors of the protection network.

Communication assumes a significant role in the intermediation of inter-institutional relationships for the promotion of collective action and regular flows of information<sup>31</sup>.

However, the greater part of the Guardianship Councilors were emphatic in stating that the

lack of communication between the institutions of the SGDCA serves mainly to intensify the low effectiveness of the care given, making it impossible to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents in a situation of sexual abuse and exploitation.

[...] *The main problem is the network – that these cases (sexual abuse and exploitation) ought to have a priority, a priority for care via network – return, feedback – because if not you lose [...] I don't have an answer ready when the case arrives, so, if we had each facility giving feedback from each one, then we would be able, we would speed things up. Do the facilities exist? They do. If they don't, let's resolve the situation. But there are many, many cases for few facilities, and for little immediate return [...]* (Testimony 03).

Getting the protection network to act requires the existence of effective channels of production and dissemination of information between the agents that participate in it. The difficulty experienced by the Councilors in the execution of an effective assistance to children and adolescents in a situation of sexual abuse and exploitation, and their families, is a set of conditions that maintains the sensation of impunity, and of non-reparation of injury to rights.

In counterpart, a study shows that, if on the one hand the Guardianship Councilor find obstacles in coordinating with the other institutions, the institutions also, unanimously, report that communication with the Councilors themselves is precarious<sup>27</sup>. In this perspective, the relationships between the Councilors and the institutions of the SGDCA in practice result in a severe reciprocity in the lack of sharing of information about the care given to cases and their needs.

The Councilors also report that the care and protection carried out by the Councils comes up against the very significant volume of demands, the large extension of the territories, and the lack of effectiveness of counter-referrals. These, they say, are the main obstacles to continuity and efficacy of care for children and adolescents and their families.

This context leads to a marked situation of non-recognition in relation to their work; and also additional concern about the public image of the Councils:

[...] *since we are the portal of entry, it is we who receive that first demand and it is we who, in the majority of cases, appear as the party that didn't do anything about it. When, in reality the Guardianship Council, it refers, that is our role – to apply the measure of protection. But people don't understand that [...]* (Testimony 11).

### Articulation with the agents that hold bring authors of sexual abuse and exploitation to account

Finally, Councilors reported difficulties for holding the authors of abuses legally responsible. This was a subject that came up spontaneously in the interviews with such emphasis that it merited a section of the study, showing the picture of importance set out by the Councilors. Without a doubt, criminal accountability is one of the social mechanisms for stopping the cycle of impunity and permissiveness in relation to sexual violence committed against children and adolescents.

The Councilors reports that sexual violence is frequently silenced by fear, insecurity, shame and the sensation of lack of support that the people involved usually feel. However, when the accusation is formalized, the family is faced with other challenges.

The Councilors reported that merely bureaucratic action, that gives no priority to the process of support for, or giving of value to, the victims of sexual violence, is still common in the Systems of Public Safety and Criminal Justice.

*The DCAV [Police Station for Child and Adolescent Victims], for example, is a specialized Police Station. The police there should be sensitive. But no, no, they're not. They attend the victim, but for a very short time, within that vision that we have of them there, it's only by a very small margin that the victims are not themselves transformed into defendants. It's something terrible. The professionals – I'm referring to police chiefs, investigators – they don't have this sensitivity [...] (Testimony 12).*

The constant impasse characterized by the discontinuity between the accusation, the service provided by the network and the court judgment, is well known. Confronting this gap is a decisive need in ensuring the principles of full protection and absolute priority that children and adolescents have the right to<sup>32</sup>.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, the exclusive competency for the process of judgment of crimes against children and adolescents has been given to the *Court for Childhood, Youth and the Elderly (Vara da Infância, da Juventude e do Idoso)*. Note that this Court does not have a specific attribution in hearing and judging crimes against children and adolescents, being also responsible for guaranteeing protection measures for the elderly. Although it represents an advantage in relation to the legal districts where such crimes are judged by the common criminal courts, there is continued concern with the sloth of the Judiciary,

which is an indisputable obstacle to the provision of legal remedy to children and adolescents in a situation of sexual violence. Thus there is a challenge of a management nature: the greater the social demands, and the less the resources to meet them, more capacity for management will be called for<sup>34</sup>.

Another exacerbating factor referred to by the Councilors that results in authors of crimes not being made accountable is the fact that many situations of sexual violence have neither physical nor material proof. Often, the narrative by children and adolescents is disbelieved, causing additional suffering for victims and their families.

### Conclusions

The testimonies by the Guardianship Councilors, based on their experience and understanding, on the subject of their activity in the context of the network for confronting violence, show a disquieting situation.

It is shown that in a capital city with the complexity of Rio de Janeiro, the network for care of children and adolescents in a situation of sexual violence, activated by the Guardianship Councils, has low density (few staff) and low connectivity between partners. As in other Brazilian capital cities, specialized attendance to children and adolescents in a situation of sexual violence, and their families, has been shown to be centralized in only a few institutions. Especially in relation to the CREAS, the capacity for care, compared to the size of the population and the low level of specific training for this type of demand, is already an indicative suggestion of the difficulties facing any attempt to give an appropriate level of care.

At the same time, the Councilors very infrequently refer to the Education and even the Health services as partners in serving these situations. This distancing impoverishes the activity of the network, and isolates areas of expertise from strategic fields of knowledge and action.

The results of this study give indications that the processes of institutional communication and joint organization need to improve, in the daily practices of the professionals of the network. Planned and agreed flows of action between the various services and actors that comprise the SGDCA also have yet to be organized. The conclusions also indicate that provision of training for Social Services, Education and Health staff in identification and notification, and in operating

on a fully coordinated and inter-sectorial basis, is also a strategic action that should be incorporated in the government's plans.

There is consensus on the need to organize collective forces – public organizations and civil society – to build a more effectively functioning network. On the other hand, it is important to note that in practice it is actually the local struggles and efforts of the participants – professional and otherwise – of the social movements that either make this transformation work and establish it – or don't. We reiterate the understanding of Rovere<sup>35</sup> that the networks exist because of the links that they are able to produce, ranging from the initial levels of recognition of the existence of the Other, the knowledge of what each one

does, and one-off or emergency help to the levels of sharing of resources, activities, objectives and projects.

As a conclusion: there is a long road ahead before the agents and agencies that comprise the present network for dealing with violence against children and adolescents will be able truly to act as an effective network actually implementing public policies. For this to happen, there is a need: partners need to be identified and committed; and working spaces and bonds need to be built around shared objectives. These are, we believe, appropriate suggestions. The solutions that can put these suggestions into effect will only come when there is the necessary continuity and institutionality.

## Collaborations

SF Deslandes e DS Campos participated in the data analysis, the planning and writing of the article.

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