

Research on children at risk has been attracting growing interest. As stated, it is a window that opens up to the world of childhood, or that opens up for many possible childhoods in the world, and to children's existential conditions (Martins, 2010, *editor's translation*). Or, we would say, research focused on children at risk offers a perspective on how the relationship of people and institutions with children has changed in time and space, following the process of global and cultural transformation.

Child at risk and abused and neglected child are distinct though related concepts. The concept of abused and neglected child, as it is legally defined, implies the existence of one of the following conditions: (a) The child is abandoned or lives in his/her own right; b) The child suffers physical or mental abuse or is a victim of sexual abuse; c) The child does not receive age appropriate or personally relevant care or affection; d) The child is in the care of third parties, during a period of time in which a strong connection was established, while simultaneously the parents failed to exercise their parental functions; e) The child is obliged to carry out work activities that are excessive or inappropriate to child's age, dignity and personal situation or harmful to child's development; f) The child is subject, directly or indirectly, to behaviors that seriously affect his/her safety or emotional balance; g) The child behaves or engages in activities or consumptions that seriously affect his/her health, safety, education or development without the parents or the legal guardians objecting it in an appropriate manner (Law no. 142/2015, of 8 September).

Therefore, while the concept of abused and neglected child has full recognition in the law, the concept of child at risk requires psychological evaluation and it means that the child is experiencing potential danger. As D. Frey describes, in psychological assessment the term "at risk" "indicates a high probability that an individual will develop specific behavioral syndromes or mental health problems". In certain circumstances the maintenance or exacerbation of risk factors may lead to dangerous situations in the absence of protective or compensatory factors (Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens, 2017).

The topic of children at risk that the Soroptimist International Club of Tavira²⁹ has decided to address in this book has been gaining increased academic interest as can be attested by the number of publications dedicated to this topic. For example, research carried out on March 10, 2017 in the Portuguese Scientific Open Access Repository (RCAAP) using as a keyword 'children at risk' resulted in a total of 4,575 documents,

²⁹ The Soroptimist Internacional Clube de Tavira was legally created on March 28, 2015. In the scope of its activities, special attention is given to the themes Women, Health and Education. Specifically on the theme of this book, the same association organized the international colloquium Children at Risk - a Multifaceted View, which took place in Tavira on August 5, 2016.

of which 1,751 are master's dissertations, 1,596 are articles, 697 are PhD dissertations, 175 are final graduation dissertations and 134 are conference papers. In particular, we observe a growing, almost uninterrupted, trend concerning the number of PhD dissertations: 34 in 2007; 34 in 2008; 49 in 2009; 44 in 2010; 48 in 2011; 50 in 2012; 67 in 2013; and 222 in 2014 (Portuguese Scientific Open Access Repository, 2017). These figures document the recent investment in disseminating scientific research in Portugal related to this topic. In addition, these figures reflect a commitment to contribute to a more effective intervention, seeking to reduce the breadth and consequences of risk factors that jeopardize a child's full development (and as a consequence, ultimately call into question the future of the country).

Media often publicizes cases of children who are victims of violence. These cases appear to have been cut off from stories of the past, and some are associated with failures of the abused and neglected child's protection system. This news has a profound impact on public opinion. In Portugal where the divorce rate in 2013 reached 70.4% (PORDATA, 2017), every year an average of 19,000 cases of parental responsibility regulation are discussed in court (Bastos, 2017). Every year 73,000 processes of promotion and protection of children are open; these processes are examined by 308 commissions for the protection of children and young people, which, in 2015, involved 5,388 technicians (Rodrigues, 2017). Nevertheless, available statistical data show that since the beginning of this century, the number of children and young people living in tutelary institutions has been decreasing, especially concerning age groups 12 to 15 years old. Figures also point to a decrease concerning the age group of 16 years old and above, except for the period of the most recent Portuguese financial and economic crisis (INE, 2017). These data suggest that the relationship between the social impact of known cases of abused and neglected children and the dimension of the phenomenon may not be a direct one.

In this respect, it should be remembered that the scientific literature has revealed a "spectacular decline of violence for the last seven centuries", the most visible aspect of which is the reduction of murder and infanticide in Western Europe. This trend may have resulted from the repression of a culture of virile honor, which implied the use of bloody violence as a form of interpersonal and intergroup conflict management, associated with the strengthening of Church and State powers and the extension of universal education based on growing scientific knowledge aimed at educating young people's customs and behaviours. The process was long, but it produced relevant results (Muchembled, 2014). In this long process, murder and infanticide have gone from inevitable and invisible to avoidable and intolerable, and their authors started to be classified as *infrahuman* as or less than human.

The Portuguese State played a central role in the above mentioned process of declining violence. In the 19th century, diminishing peoples' risk of death became a goal and responsibility of the State. And accordingly many actions centered on the prevention of infanticide, malnutrition and epidemics that mainly decimated children were implemented. The relative success with these actions and the political and cultural

transformations of the country throughout the nineteenth century required the reformulation of the concept of children at risk, as can be seen from the historical perspective offered by **A. Anica** in this book.

Taking a look at contemporary socioeconomic transformations, **M. Freire** explores the relationship between the process of urbanization, development, inequality and living conditions of children and their families. In addition, she explains the importance of public investment to ensure quality care in child support, especially in the Portuguese case, given the situation of Portugal in the international context.

The text by **D. Frey** deals with the definition of the concept of child at risk from a mental health perspective and its behavioral consequences and presents a multidimensional model of risk factors in children (maternal, nutritional, environmental, traumatic and stress), considering the different contexts -- community, family and individual. His text further clarifies the type of interventions that should be promoted to reduce the risk factors in children with disruptive behavior disorders.

P. Piedade & L. Picoito characterize how domestic violence affects children in Portugal, as well as the lawful processing of this type of violence. **S. Rufino** uses the current model of promotion and protection of children and young people to analyze how this model was implemented in the concrete case of the municipality of Tavira. Focusing further on the analysis, **I. Castelo** presents a case study to elucidate how the clinical psychologist in the exercise of her professional activity accompanies an abused and neglected child. Finally, **M. Horta** relates a case she experienced as a childhood educator, to exemplify how, in a kindergarten class context, it is possible to contribute to overcoming the disruptive behavior of children at risk.

In short, the present work aims at contributing to a multidimensional view of the child at risk, articulating the diachronic perspective, centered on the relationship between the process of (re) structuring the concept and the process of socioeconomic and cultural transformation in the contemporary era, with the synchronic perspective, favoring the contributions of the psychological, legal and educational approaches to understand the phenomenon, both from a theoretical and a practical perspective.

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