

**ADOLESCENTS IN SUFFERING SITUATIONS IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT: THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL DUTY IN A MILITARY SCHOOL**

**ADOLESCENTES EM SITUAÇÃO DE SOFRIMENTO NO CONTEXTO ESCOLAR: O  
PLANTÃO PSICOLÓGICO EM UM COLÉGIO MILITAR**

**ADOLESCENTES EN SITUACIÓN DE SUFRIMIENTO EN EL CONTEXTO  
ESCOLAR: EL DEBER PSICOLÓGICO EN UNA ESCUELA MILITAR**



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**How to reference this article:**

NICOLAU, C. F. S.; CALAIS, S. L.; CARDOSO, H. F. Adolescents in suffering situations in the school context: the psychological duty in a military school. **Doxa: Rev. Bras. Psico. e Educ.**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. 00, e024011, 2024. e-ISSN: 2594-8385. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30715/doxa.v25i00.19657>



| Submitted: 28/06/2024

| Revisions required: 31/10/2024

| Approved: 08/11/2024

| Published: 12/12/2024

**Editor:** Prof. Dr. Paulo Rennes Marçal Ribeiro

**Deputy Executive Editor:** Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reports on a practice of welcoming young students at a Military College located in the state of Tocantins. The activity was part of a supervised curricular internship in School and Educational Psychology. The target audience was served at the school institution itself, between March and June 2022. A total of 33 consultations were carried out in the form of Psychological Support. Through listening offered during shifts, we found reports about interpersonal conflicts in the school environment, crises in relationships with family and friends, sadness, and feelings of abandonment. Furthermore, students complained about the rigor of discipline and alleged abuses of authority in the school environment. The analyses and discussions carried out during the internship supervision meetings pointed to the relevance of psychological duty as a powerful device for promoting well-being and mental health in the school context.

**KEYWORDS:** Military College. Teenagers. Psychological Support. School and Educational Psychology.

**RESUMO:** *O presente artigo relata uma prática de acolhimento de adolescentes estudantes de um Colégio Militar situado no estado do Tocantins. A atividade fez parte de um estágio curricular supervisionado em Psicologia Escolar e Educacional. O público-alvo foi atendido na própria instituição escolar, no período entre março e junho de 2022. Realizou-se um total de 33 atendimentos na modalidade de Plantão Psicológico. Por meio da escuta oferecida nos plantões, constatamos relatos sobre conflitos interpessoais no ambiente escolar, crises nas relações com familiares e amigos, tristeza e sensação de abandono. Ademais, estudantes queixaram-se do rigor disciplinar e de supostos abusos de autoridade no ambiente escolar. As análises e discussões realizadas durante os encontros de supervisão do estágio evidenciaram a relevância do plantão psicológico como um dispositivo eficaz para a promoção do bem-estar e da saúde mental no contexto escolar.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Colégio Militar. Adolescentes. Acolhimento Psicológico. Psicologia Escolar e Educacional.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo relata una práctica de acogida de jóvenes estudiantes en un colegio militar situado en el estado de Tocantins. La actividad formó parte de una pasantía curricular supervisada en Psicología Escolar y Educativa. El público objetivo fue atendido en la propia institución escolar, entre marzo y junio de 2022. Se realizaron un total de 33 consultas en la modalidad de Apoyo Psicológico. A través de la escucha ofrecida durante los turnos, encontramos relatos sobre conflictos interpersonales en el ambiente escolar, crisis en las relaciones con familiares y amigos, tristeza y sentimientos de abandono. Además, los estudiantes se quejaron del rigor de la disciplina y presuntos abusos de autoridad en el ambiente escolar. Los análisis y discusiones realizados durante las reuniones de supervisión de las prácticas señalaron la relevancia del deber psicológico como un poderoso dispositivo para promover el bienestar y la salud mental en el contexto escolar.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Colegio Militar. Adolescentes. Apoyo Psicológico. Psicología Escolar y Educativa.*

## Introduction

Brazilian public schools have undergone significant changes in the last thirty years, especially as a result of the so-called managed revolution that took place between 1995 and 2002, especially the universalization of access to basic education (Bianchi, 2008). However, the expansion of access to public education has not been accompanied by the investment needed to guarantee the quality of teaching. As a result, numerous fractures have been observed in educationally and institutionally worn-out school contexts. Among the problems are school dropouts and low-performance levels ascertained by internal and external evaluations.

In 2023, the Basic School Development Index (IDEB), an indicator that measures the academic performance of Brazilian schools, registered failure rates (failure plus dropout) of 6.2 for third-year high school students from public schools, in contrast to an average of 1.1 for students from private schools. Regarding the performance of public and private schools, for the same grade mentioned above, there were 4.1 for state schools and 5.6 for private schools. The results indicate weaknesses and challenges linked to public education (Brasil, 2023).

Public schools also suffer from the problem of violence, which reflects social inequality and the lack of policies to guarantee access to fundamental rights and guarantees. Violence thus breaks down borders, permeates the most diverse contexts, and affects "the educational process of the developing individual and the constitution of their knowledge" (Silva; Negreiros, 2020, p. 328, our translation). Abramovay (2021) warns of the different forms of violence that permeate everyday school life and affect "the order, motivation, satisfaction and expectations of all those who attend school" (Abramovay, 2021, p. 07, our translation).

A study carried out in 2016, with the support of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), the Organization of Inter-American States (OEI), and the Ministry of Education, found that physical and verbal violence affected 42% of public-school students. Another growing problem in the educational environment is drug trafficking in and around schools, thus increasing the risk of other consequences of crime (Abramovay; Castro; Silva, Cerqueira, 2016). Problems such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and other manifestations of prejudice and intolerance also emerge as challenges to be faced. In the words of Abramovay (2021):

Violence in schools is a worrying phenomenon. On the one hand, because of the effects it has on those who practice it, those who suffer, and those who witness it. On the other hand, they contribute to stripping the school of its status

as a place of friendship, pleasure, and the quest to know and learn (p. 07, our translation).

Faced with the challenges facing public schools and the insecurity experienced by the majority of the Brazilian population, in recent years, there has been a movement to transfer the administration of public schools to the Military Police, on the grounds that the control policies and disciplinary practices of the military model could solve problems and strengthen the public education system.

As a result, in addition to the military colleges in operation in various states and regions of the country, the Brazilian public education system came to include the so-called civic-military schools. Through Presidential Decree No. 10,004 (Brazil, 2019), the National Program for Civic-Military Schools (PECIM) promoted the implementation of 216 Civic-Military Schools (ECIM) in all regions of the country. This was an initiative developed by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense, with technical cooperation and the transfer of resources to the schools that joined the program. As a result, pedagogical proposals and disciplinary practices similar to those used in military schools were implemented in militarized schools.

In a study carried out by Benevides and Soares (2020), the performance of students from military and regular public schools was compared. The study showed that students from military schools performed better.

The efficiency of the military model is often associated with its quest to model and control behavior. However, in addition to this, one must consider the fact that military schools generally rely on financial resources from state security departments, which are in addition to those guaranteed by the Ministry of Education.

Of the oldest military schools in Brazil, we can highlight the pioneering one in Goiás, which has gained considerable attention due to its good results in school performance indicators achieved in exams such as the National High School Exam (Enem) and IDEB, serving as an example for the implementation of new schools with this structure.

When we talk about the good performance of students linked to military or militarized schools, however, we must make some considerations. In the words of Benevides and Soares (2020):

Behind this unprecedented expansion is the unquestionable good performance of students in assessments such as the *Prova Brasil* and the National High School Exam (ENEM) and the strict discipline and respect for hierarchy typical of military methodology. However, this direct attribution of this performance differential as an effect of the school is questionable given that

military school students are usually differentiated, both by family characteristics and by the accumulation of knowledge (initial condition), in addition to the very selection process that military schools establish. In other words, the differential performance of military schools may be more related to the selection process than their pedagogical proposal (Benevides; Soares, 2020, p. 318, our translation).

There are other controversies associated with militarized teaching proposals. It can be seen that the work of the Military Police is not limited to school administration activities since, through discourse, disciplinary practices, and institutional rites, military doctrine is imposed, making military schools similar to barracks, except in due proportion.

Studies on the militarization of education point to problems such as threats to the democratic rule of law, especially as a result of impediments to guaranteeing the right to citizen education, which should be based on democratic principles (Santos; Pereira, 2018; Ximenes; Stuchi; Moreira, 2019). In many cases, it is worth noting that access to military schools depends on passing entrance exams. In addition, the need to pay for uniforms can prevent the poorest from accessing these schools.

There are several problems surrounding this process of militarizing education. The model's authoritarian profile can lead to: the implementation of educational proposals without prior consultation with the school community; a lack of respect for the law, almost always expressed through the charging of undue fees; the reservation of vacancies for dependents of military personnel; the establishment of centralized management that is insensitive to the social and institutional reality, with the dismissal of principals elected by the school community; the imposition of concepts, norms and values of the military institution on students and teachers.

It is worth noting, however, that the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) - Law No. 9.394/96 (Brazil, 1996), in item VIII of article 3, establishes democratic management in educational institutions as a fundamental principle. Article 14 also provides for the establishment of rules to ensure democratic governance in public basic education schools. These rules must be aligned with the peculiarities of each institution and promote the participation of education professionals in the planning of school activities and in the drafting of the school's Pedagogical Political Project (PPP).

In the words of Santos and Alves (2022),

[...] militarization subverts the principles and purposes of the school by interdicting the plurality of ideas, democratic management, the autonomy of schools and education professionals, the possibility of learning, among other

aspects, thus also clashing with the precepts established by the set of laws that regulate basic education in Brazil (p. 14, our translation).

In addition to the ethical and legal implications pointed out, we are faced with the problem of the psychosocial suffering produced in school contexts that emphasize discipline, order, and establishing standardized expectations in terms of behavior, attitudes, values, desires, conduct, etc. As Bortolini (2021) points out, "the 'military pedagogy' stigmatizes as deviant a myriad of experiences, subjects, cultures, reducing possibilities of existence and recurrently producing suffering" (p. 109, our translation).

It was in contact with this indoctrinating school model, permeated with unease, that we developed the project to be reported. Over the course of a semester, we offered psychological support to teenage high school students linked to a military school located in the state of Tocantins. Before moving on to the account of the experience, however, we would like to briefly discuss the perspective we have taken in understanding adolescence.

### **Adolescence as a social and historical construction**

Traditional approaches to human development define adolescence as a period of crisis, conflict, ambiguity, change, and tension. Scholars such as Erik Erikson, Arminda Aberastury, Maurice Debesse, and Maurício Knobel have perpetuated these definitions, associating adolescence with crises, tensions, and conflicts (Ozella; Aguiar, 2008).

However, Becker (2017) highlights the existence of different forms of adolescence in Western society. The author uses the case of poor children, who are often thrown into adulthood without even experiencing what we conventionally call adolescence, as an example. This attentive approach is fundamental if we are to overcome the traditional definitions of this stage of development, considering its social and historical nature, which is related to political, historical, cultural, and social factors.

Ozella (2002) discusses the historical construction of adolescence in the context of modern society, pointing out that technological advances throughout history have made it necessary for workers to become more specialized in order to deal with the complexity of work. In that context, the school emerged as the institution responsible for the specialized training of the workforce. Also, in the course of technological and social transformations, a portion of the population has postponed the start of working life. Thus, the combination of high unemployment rates caused by advances in the means of production and the need for greater qualifications led to an extension of the schooling period and created the social, historical, and

cultural conditions for the emergence of what has been called adolescence (Ozella, 2002). In the words of Zaniani (2018):

[...] without denying the existence of adolescence, but understanding it as being historically constructed and signified by men themselves as a form of social identity, we remember that this possibility - giving oneself the right to live this time of postponement - is the privilege of some classes and social groups, especially the children of the middle and upper classes, for whom studies and training for the future would make sense and would be guaranteed. The children of working-class families, however, have been inserted into the world of work from an early age, subjected to all kinds of exploitation, and therefore not given the opportunity to choose (p. 19, our translation).

Criticism of the basis of the understanding of adolescence is necessary, especially in the face of the predominance of uncritical and anhistorical approaches that understand it as a "natural phase of development", making analysis and actions that take into account the subjective dimension of adolescents' daily lives impoverished and biased.

### **The Psychological Clinic is a welcoming space for adolescents at the Military College**

In general, the term *on-call* refers to outpatient, medical practices focused on urgencies and emergencies (Machado; Fonseca, 2019). In some areas of psychology, however, shifts are configured as welcoming and listening devices. In the present work, we offer on-call sessions with the central aim of building a listening and welcoming space for students in situations of suffering.

The work was carried out at a Military Police College located in the state of Tocantins, through a partnership between the Psychology Course of the Federal University of Tocantins and the Educational Guidance Service (SOE) of that institution. The activities were linked to a compulsory curricular internship with an emphasis on School and Educational Psychology.

In view of the large number of students enrolled at the school, we decided not to publicize it widely; the trainees assigned to the activity passed on the information about the shifts from classroom to classroom. They made themselves available for appointments on specific days and times of the week, on spontaneous demand. In other words, it wouldn't be possible to schedule sessions. This care was taken to avoid the idea that our work replicated the clinical-ambulatory model in the school context.

The work was carried out between the months of March and April 2022, on three days of the week, on Wednesdays in the morning, between 09:00 and 12:30, and on Thursdays and

Fridays in the afternoon, between 14:00 and 17:25. For each day and time indicated, there was a trainee present. The sessions lasted an average of 30 minutes. It is worth noting that the room used for shifts was air-conditioned and soundproofed.

A total of 33 visits were carried out. Female students aged between 15 and 17 made up the largest audience. They usually went to their shifts in the company of a classmate, often with symptoms typical of anxiety, including palpitations, crying, and agitation.

As for the public's reasons for seeking help, the most important are difficulties concentrating and fear of failure in assessments and other school activities. There were also reports of interpersonal conflicts experienced inside and outside the school. Similarly, we found problems associated with the fraying of bonds, the breaking of ties, and the consequent feeling of abandonment in the subjective experience of some of the people taken in by the team of trainees.

In addition, students who were suffering from situations involving fights, intra-family conflicts, relationship breakdowns, and problems in interpersonal relationships at the school itself were welcomed. There were cases involving experiences of mourning the death of loved ones, a sense of abandonment in the relationship with parents, and a feeling of deep sadness, with the triggering of non-suicidal self-injury, a feeling of worthlessness, and suicidal ideation.

With the trainees' empathy and willingness to welcome students who demanded sensitive and judgment-free listening, as well as the production of analyses and reflections based on relevant references for the dialog between psychology and education, we had the opportunity to promote health under the logic of care (Ferro; Antunes, 2015).

Taking into account the historical and social factors linked to the construction of adolescence, we were able to measure the effects of the practices of control and domination perpetrated by the military model of education on the subjective constitution of the public attended at the psychological reception centers. From this perspective, the actions linked to the Psychological On-Call were guided by a critical and reflective approach, which was crucial for guiding the listening, welcoming, and referrals made by the trainees during the development of this practice.

In the midst of the uncertainties and instability intensified in the pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, when the work was carried out, the offer of psychological shifts fostered experiences of resignification and subjective strengthening necessary to cope with symptoms of anxiety and other expressions of subjective malaise (Araújo; Rocinholi, 2019) experienced in that context. The welcoming space set up in an environment marked by discipline provided



an escape from permanent surveillance, almost always accompanied by micropenalties linked to the control and normalization devices present in the military model (Foucault, 1987).

### **Considerations on working at the health/education interface**

In Brazil, until the late 1970s, the work of psychologists in schools was marked by the adoption of clinical-therapeutic models characterized by an individualistic, uncritical, decontextualized, adaptationist, and consequently, exclusionary approach (Antunes, 2008; Bezerra, 2014).

That historical moment in psychology was characterized by an emphasis on the application of psychometrically based tests and other psychological techniques with the potential to blame students and even their families for the difficulties they encountered in school life. It was noticed that the focus on the individual dimension leaves out of the analysis and interventions the historical, social, cultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors crucial to the educational process. Thus, as an effect of a reductionist approach to complex school problems, the so-called psychological factors stand out. For this reason, the criticism of the practices of school psychology that are insensitive to the complexity of the phenomena produced in the educational field has intensified. Furthermore, the clinical-therapeutic framework for school difficulties was criticized, as it was disconnected from the educational dimension and had the potential to psychologize and pathologize the educational process (Antunes, 2008).

Over the years, especially since the 1990s, School and Educational Psychology has strengthened as an area of knowledge based on criticism of the problems that have increased with the expansion of access to public education. In that context, a critical approach to school psychology was consolidated. Interventions and studies inspired by the institutionalist movement targeted pedagogical practices and the relationships established in school spaces, as well as proposing new definitions and ways of understanding subjectivity (Eizirik, 1993; Machado, 1994). From the same perspective of change and broadening of focus, school psychology was influenced by the theories of child development of Jean Piaget, Henri Wallon, and Lev S. Vigotski (Barbosa, 2011).

Criticism of the reductionism and short-sightedness of the clinical-therapeutic model has grown and removed the health dimension from this area of action and knowledge production. Thus, the research and actions promoted over the last few decades have prioritized the educational dimension and emphasized the problems related to so-called school failure

(Patto, 1990).

However, although criticism and a move away from reductionist and pathologizing approaches are fundamental, we are seeing the emergence of many demands related to mental health in school contexts. Phenomena such as depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, attempts, and consummation of self-extermination are frequent and call us to work at the health/education interface. In this context, the Psychological Clinic emerged as a way of intervening in the demands of suffering emerging in the school context. It is not a question, therefore, of neglecting the complexity of school phenomena and the risks of acting in a way that is disconnected from the educational dimension. In reality, it's about realizing the urgency of reinventing ourselves in order to promote a critical school psychology that is sensitive to emerging demands.

We consider the fact that School and Educational Psychology (SEP) has theoretical references and methodological tools to support the promotion of care in school institutions in an ethical, critical way, in a movement different from that in which reductionist, adaptationist, and psychologizing ideas are reproduced. We can remain vital in understanding the phenomena produced in everyday school life and welcome the demands associated with the suffering produced and manifested in this context (Bezerra, 2014).

### **Final considerations**

The shifts were carried out in the context of a return to face-to-face activities after the acute periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the welcoming sessions, we came into contact with the unfolding of problems faced before, during, and after the health crisis.

By opening up spaces for listening and the circulation of words in an institutional context that is vigilant, normalizing, punitive, and insensitive to human suffering, we gain access to a reality permeated with affections and full of contradictions. Through the accounts shared with the trainees, we found records of moments of happiness and hope to merge with crying, bouts of anxiety, fear, interpersonal conflicts, punishments, depression, suicidal ideation, and self-injury.

With each shift, the trainees were able to collaborate in dealing with a subjective unease shared by many students. Psychosocial suffering was understood in its complexity, taking into account its articulation with psychological, social, historical, political, economic, pedagogical, and institutional factors. From this perspective, we are going against the reductionist and

stigmatizing practices that are almost always present in mental health promotion actions.

On other occasions, we can expand the care actions through group interventions, with the aim of reaching teachers, managers, students, and their families or guardians, making the actions more comprehensive. Furthermore, the group perspective allows us to collectively analyze and approach the phenomena produced in the collective dimension.

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### ***CRediT Author Statement***

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- **Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the technicians of the Educational Guidance Service of the school where the actions reported were carried out.
  - **Funding:** This publication was made possible by the financial support provided by the Federal University of Tocantins, through the Dean of Research and the Postgraduate Program in Science and Health Education (PPGECS).
  - **Conflicts of interest:** There are no conflicts of interest.
  - **Ethical approval:** Not applicable.
  - **Data and material availability:** Not applicable.
  - **Authors' contributions:** All the authors participated in the conception and elaboration of the analyses and reflections associated with the experience reported.
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**Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.**  
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation.

