

FROM MIDWEST BRAZIL TO NORTHERN PORTUGAL: EXPERIENCE(S) WITH INTEGRATIVE COMMUNITY THERAPY

DO CENTRO-OESTE BRASILEIRO AO NORTE PORTUGUÊS: EXPERIÊNCIA(S) COM A TERAPIA COMUNITÁRIA INTEGRATIVA

DESDE EL CENTRO-OESTE DE BRASIL AL NORTE DE PORTUGUÊS: EXPERIENCIA (S) CON TERAPIA COMUNITARIA INTEGRATIVA

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ABSTRACT: This text seeks to describe the main actions with Integrative Community Therapy (TCI), from 2017 to 2019, from Cuiabá – MT, in Midwest Brazil, to the city of Bragança, in northern Portugal, pointing out the diversity of groups served, as well as the culture and age group as elements to be considered for the effectiveness of the therapy circle. Furthermore, this work aims to contribute to the dissemination of the TCI, pointing to future possibilities of research or serving as background/data to it.

KEYWORDS: Integrative community therapy. Experience. Brazil. Portugal. University extension.

RESUMO: Busca-se nesse texto descrever as principais ações com a Terapia Comunitária Integrativa, de 2017 a 2019, desde Cuiabá – MT, no centro-oeste brasileiro, até a cidade de Bragança, no norte português, apontando para a diversidade de grupos atendidos, bem como para a cultura e a faixa etária como elementos a serem considerados, para a efetividade da roda de terapia. Ademais, esse trabalho objetiva contribuir com a divulgação da TCI, apontando para possibilidades futuras de pesquisa ou servindo como fundo/base/dado, para a mesma.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Terapia comunitária integrativa. Experiência. Brasil. Portugal. Extensão universitária.

RESUMEN: Este texto busca describir las principales acciones con Terapia Comunitaria Integrativa (TCI), de 2017 a 2019, desde Cuiabá – MT, en el centro-oeste de Brasil, hasta la ciudad de Bragança, en el norte de Portugal, señalando la diversidad de grupos atendidos, así en cuanto a la cultura y el grupo de edad como elementos a considerar, para la efectividad de la rueda terapéutica. Además, este trabajo tiene como objetivo contribuir a la difusión de las

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TCI, apontando a futuras possibilidades de investigação o servindo como fundo / base / dados para a mesma.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Terapia comunitaria integrativa. Experiencia. Brasil. Portugal. Extensão universitaria.*

Introduction

For some time we have been systematizing our practices with/in Integrative Community Therapy (ICT): Projeto Laços (2019)³, ICT in the north of Portugal (2019)⁴, Projeto Aconchega (2019; 2018; 2017)⁵, Living in ICT (2019)⁶, ICT at VER-SUS (2018)⁷, ICT with elderly people in Portugal (2018)⁸. With the intention of leaving marks/traces of this integrative and complementary practice in health and its possibilities of insertion in different contexts and groups.

Community Therapy is a group therapeutic resource, created by the Brazilian doctor Adalberto Barreto, on the outskirts of Fortaleza - CE, which constitutes a sociocultural space of experience and coexistence, where people listen, speak and share their problems, producers of suffering in everyday life (BARRETO; LAZARTE, 2013).

Our approach to ICT, took place through university extension, which is configured as the return of the university to society, to communities; or to put it another way, it is working with the community, in order to overcome (or begin to overcome) its main needs. In 2016, during a collection of demands for intervention, through an extension project under development on the outskirts of Cuiabá - MT, we considered the potential of Community Therapy in the management of issues; as we wrote down the problems, we remembered the ICT project, carried out by the Tutorial Education Program (PET) *Conexões de Saberes* at UFMT. PET *Conexões de Saberes* is a project that aims to bring together students of popular origin, in an interdisciplinary way, stimulating their protagonism in the organization and development of actions, with which they identify, to be implemented, mainly, in popular / peripheral communities (BATISTA LEITE *et al.*, 2019). However, precisely because we are also members of PET and follow the performance of the project, we knew that the project could not take on

³ Article/experience report published in a Portuguese magazine (AdolesCiência - IPB).

⁴ Work presented at the ABRATECOM Congress, in Salvador - BA.

⁵ Papers presented: in 2017, at the State Collective Health Meeting (ISC / UFMT); in 2018, at the International Scientific Day (IPB - Portugal) and at the ASPESM Congress (Portugal, which resulted in e-book publication); in 2019, at the Mato Grosso Forum for Health Promotion (Mato Grosso).

⁶ At the Meeting of PET Groups in the Midwest/ECOPET (Cuiabá).

⁷ Papers presented at the International Congress of the United Network (Manaus).

⁸ Work presented at the International Scientific Day (IPB - Portugal).

this task, since it already had an expressive demand for actions to be carried out. It was then that we made ourselves available for the ICT formation process.

In Mato Grosso, the first community therapy formation took place in 2008/2009, in the city of Sorriso, being promoted by the State Department of Health, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the ICT formation centers, accredited by the Brazilian Association of Community Therapy (ABRATECOM). In this class, professors Rosa Lúcia R. Ribeiro (Faculty of Nursing/UFMT) and Mirian Sewo (Institute of Education/UFMT) were present, who, after the immersion course, began to perform ICT circles in the city of Cuiabá, in units hospitals, at the university itself and on the outskirts of the municipality (PET CONEXÕES) (UFMT, 2020). Inserted in the Dean of Student Assistance/UFMT (PRAE), which as its name suggests, aims to assist students, meeting the main socio-assistance demands and ensuring the permanence of these students in the institution (UFMT, 2020), articulated in 2013/2014, a new formation in ICT; this time, in the city of Cuiabá (RIBEIRO, 2020). Our participation took place in the third formation, implemented in 2016, in the municipality of Sinop and which was also a PRAE project, articulated together with UFMT/Sinop Student Assistance Supervision, which coordinated the project.

From our insertion in ICT, we left with the commitment/responsibility to disseminate and implement this group therapeutic resource, in our respective workplaces. As our work context has been the university, especially its “extension” pillar, this is where we have exercised, primarily, community therapy. Therefore, this text has the intention of “putting together”, in the experience report, our brief journey with/at ICT.

In the Brazilian Midwest, Aconchega

After the formative process was finished in Sinop, a group of graduates, from/in the city of Cuiabá, specifically, from the Federal University of Mato Grosso, together with community therapists already formed and working in the municipality, met to propose a project, in exchange for the university, which paid for the formative process. In the municipality, there was already a consolidated ICT project, operating in the Reference Unit for Integrative and Complementary Practices in Health of the Municipal Health Secretariat, since 2013 (RIBEIRO, 2020) - which had even been initiated by PET. But what was proposed there was a space dedicated to the university environment, given the high demand for psychosocial support received by PRAE, and the expressive number of suicide cases among university students.

Among the first guidelines of the group was the choice of the name of the project. One of the suggestions was Escutatória, an agglutination that alluded to the importance of listening and of the story (s) in the ICT circles. But in the end, after a heated debate, Aconchega was chosen, at the suggestion of one of the participating therapists, emerging as the name and synthesis of the project - a space of coziness. According to Bartniski and Carvalho "The name of the project is not [...] random, cozy is a word that brings together, which comforts, which makes participants feel welcomed, cozy" (BARTNISKI; CARVALHO, 2019, p. 3, our translation). And that name came to remember the students who leave the warmth of their homes, family, friends, in search of a dream (higher education) and who in the process, often suffer from distance, from missing. Aconchega came to help deal with this issue.

As an extension project, Aconchega, started in May 2017 and with circles on a weekly basis, has become a space for welcoming and caring for the mental health to the academic community, as well as the external community (BATISTA LEITE *et al.*, 2018), where they could share their experiences, whether of joy or sadness; a space for promoting interaction and building solidarity networks (BARTNISKI; CARVALHO, 2019).

From 2017 to 2019, the Aconchega Project served 621 people, in 75 ICT wheels, as shown in table 1.

Table 1 – Number of circles and participants of the UFMT Aconchega Project, 2017 to 2019

Year	Circles	Participants
2017	26	176
2018	24	133
2019	25	312
Total	75	621

Source: Projeto Aconchega (UFMT)

TCI in Northern Portugal

As we said before (BATISTA LEITE *et al.*, 2019), as soon as we arrived in Bragança, Portugal, for the realization of our international mobility, we joined the Brazilian Students Association (AEBIBP), since our journey in Brazil was marked by processes of participation in various academic instances, from student representation to teaching, research and extension projects, especially the latter. In the association, it was requested, by the direction, to the student community, the offer of activities to the community itself. For our part, given our formation, we propose the offer of ICT circles and the application of Reiki; but as this last practice took

more time and served fewer people - not that it was less important -, so we decided to carry out only the ICT.

At the time of our entry into the association, a process of cooperation between it and a local association of artisans was in progress. Thus, our activity proposal became the main object of cooperation, which established the weekly realization of therapy circles with users of the institution. We then gave this action the name of the Therapeutic Circle, which was configured as a project.

From April to June 2018, the Therapeutic Circle Project carried out 7 circles, serving 78 participants, mostly elderly. Among the most recurrent problems in the circles, were the lack of peace, worry, impotence, sadness, anxiety and fear. After the sessions, the feelings brought were of love, fraternity, strength, friendship, peace, learning, affection, courage and patience.

In order to more precisely identify the benefits before and after the ICT circle, as well as to identify what could be modified or continued in the project, we developed an evaluation tool (figure 1), which each participant filled out at the end of the circle. The instrument contained three cards, with the same numbering, in order to know that the answers were from the same person, and in different colors, to facilitate the elderly, who might have reading difficulties.

Figure 1 – evaluation tool of the ICT circles



Source: Devised by Lucas Leite, with review of Jéssica Botelho (2018)

Of the responses, we highlight one that marked us. He therefore marked it as a recurring case on circles. A lady, assiduous in our activities, always presented the same problem: her niece in drug addiction. And since she was her only family, she asked us to intervene. Our answer was always the same: bring her our circle, that's what we can offer. And she did. In the last ICT that we carried out in the association, she managed to take her niece, who remained in

silence for the whole circle, observing, answering only at the end, in the positive connotations (what one is bringing from the circle): “that therapy is not a cowards' place”. We could still read in her review:

When I arrived, I felt like: Still little in me due to the crises that I had me in the last days;

After the ICT, I felt like: With a door to open;

Suggestion: Don't stay with the image that you had of me today, for another time.

Unfortunately, the project did not continue, due to bureaucratic issues, but we were able to glimpse the potential of community therapy with this specific group.

Also in this semester, we organized together with AEBIPB, an International Scientific Day, where we propose the realization of a Community Therapy circle, as an activity - mini-course, of the event. The circle counted with 9 participants, all of whom were Brazilian students and had as their chosen theme “anguish with the future”. Among the coping strategies pointed out were: changing cities and professions, support from friends, living one day at a time/now and demanding less of yourself. Participants brought from the circle sharing, gratitude, welcoming etc. This, without a doubt, was the most emotional circle we made on Portuguese soil.

The accumulation provided by the Therapeutic Circle project and the short course, which in truth, was an experience, allowed us to create the Projeto Laços, which aimed at carrying out ICT with students (BATISTA LEITE *et al.*, 2019). Eleven sessions were held with the participation of 40 students, whose activities do not have to be explained here since they are published in the IPB AdolesCiência journal.

Our last actions in Lusitanian lands, in relation to community therapy, are limited to two circles, which in truth, we would say is not a community therapy in itself, but spaces for listening and speaking, using the methodological elements of ICT. It is a circle, held in a university soiree, at the invitation of a Bragantino commercial establishment; and another, developed within an ongoing intervention project, at Santa Casa of Bragança.

We can say that our actions, in a way, mark the history of ICT in Portugal, since as can be consulted on the page of the European Association for Integrative Community Therapy, the practice started in the country, in September 2018, in the city of Sintra and which is currently being promoted by the Association for Integrated Environmental and Community Health - AMISAC.

Back to the Brazilian center

As soon as we returned to Brazil, in February 2019, we again included ourselves in community therapy activities, together with Aconchega and in parallel actions. Among these actions, we point out a workshop—experience that we held at the Regional Meeting of Tutorial Education Programs of the Midwest (ECOPET) and our participation, for the first time, in the ABRATECOM Congress, in September/2019.

In the process of closure, we would like to resume a striking action: at the end of 2019, Aconchega, at the invitation of a public school in Cuiabá, held ICT circles with teachers and students for two days, one of which was used entirely to attend students. In all, 04 circles were held - 01 with teachers (20 participants) and 03 with students (98 participants) from elementary and high school. What caught our attention in these circles was the emotional exhaustion of the entire school community served.

Among the teachers, anguish/frustration prevailed due to the lack of appreciation of the category and the lack of structure for the exercise of teaching; this feeling, unanimous among the participants, who transformed the circle, in some moments, into a place of collective outburst. In relation to the students, we highlight a circle, in which two issues stood out: the suffering of a transsexual student, in transition and the self-sentence of death given by another, due to an aesthetic mark.

The circle in question was programmed to follow the usual protocol, used in most therapies, in which the theme to be explored emerges in the circle itself, but it happened that the students did not want to participate in any way. We then decided to modify the protocol, proposing a thematic circle and taking as a motto the following: who here has already gone through a situation of bullying or prejudice and how did they deal with/overcome it? That was when the students started to speak. 06 students told their stories. Among them, a student in a phase of sexual transition, who reported the lack of family support and that the school was his only refuge and still, even so, sometimes suffered in this space, with the prejudice of people who did not understand him. And another, fourteen years old, who had given himself a life span (up to the age of 20), if he was unable to undergo dental treatment to correct a dental deviation, which made him look “toothless” and, consequently, to be a victim of constant bullying. It is important to say that this student, during the circle, spent most of the time with a headset in his ear, with extremely loud sound and only “entered the circle”, from the emotional testimony of the trans student. The moving thing there was the other students crying and, in the end, hugging each other, apologizing, supporting each other.

No less important, it is worth mentioning that Aconchega received, in November 2019, an honorable mention as a successful experience in health promotion, by the Mato Grosso State Department of Health.

Final considerations

If in this brief three-year journey with ICT we were able to experience different human sufferings, in different groups and in different cultures, we were also able to prove what we learned from Adalberto Barreto: “who has the problem, has the solution”.

From our experience in two different countries, we highlight the importance of culture, of understanding people from their places of origin, in understanding feelings/problems/needs, as well as in the collective search for solutions. If not considered, culture may become a limitation on the effectiveness of the therapy circle.

Considering the age group is also a key factor. If, on the one hand, the elderly often want to talk excessively or put themselves in the right to advise, given their life experiences (regardless of the rules of the circle), on the other hand, teenagers close up, shut up, demanding skills from the therapist adaptation and/or innovation compatible with this audience.

ICT with its simple method has been constituted as a powerful resource of care and promotion in mental health and this work has the sole and exclusive objective of contributing to its dissemination, pointing to future research possibilities or serving as a background/base/data for it.

To paraphrase Mariani (2018, p. 44, our translation), who reports an advice she received from her supervisor, linguist Eni Orlandi: “learn to protect your work by working. Work, when it is good, appears on its own”. We would say that this is the path we have taken with ICT: protecting it, making circles; leaving free to anyone who wants to see/experience, its benefits and repercussions.

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