

Building alliances in daycares.

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The article explores the dynamic roles of psychologists, educators and parents in daycares. The main aim of this qualitative study is to underline if parents and caregivers are aware of the important role of the psychologist in enhancing the quality of care in two of Durrës daycares. The article put emphasis on building alliances between psychologists, parents and educators to enhance the quality of care not only in Durrës daycares, but in Albanian daycares also. To get the information, there have been conducted semi-structured interviews.

Based on the information taken by the interviews, psychologists should be part of the daycares staff. However, in some cases, parents and educators do not have an accurate perception of the role the psychologist has in daycares and they think that the role of the psychologist is related only with intervening when children have developmental delays or other developmental disorders.

In conclusion, psychologists need to specify more clearly their role and functions when interacting with parents and educators. Daycares' psychologists intervene not only with children that show development disorders but their functions are even related with consulting educators, parents so as to enhance the quality of care at home and in daycare settings.

Key words: *Daycares, Psychologists, Alliances, Parents, Educators*

Introduction

Our society needs to pay close attention to the development that happens during the first years of life. Happy and healthy childhoods are the basis of healthy and equilibrated societies. The latest researches show that the early years of development have an important impact in the life of human beings. This is due to the process of maturation that occurs in specific areas of the brain, especially in the first three years of life.

This study is focused in daycare settings, where children of six month until three years old spend most of their time. A very important issue that arises is how to create safe, warm and adequate environments not only at home but as well in daycares.

One of the crucial functions of psychologists in daycares is to build alliances between parents and caregivers. Psychologists in daycare help to enhance the quality of care and to make parents and educators more aware of the importance of children's development stages.

On the other hand, psychology is a new field compared with other fields of studies, and in Albania the field of psychology is brand new, nearly two decades since it was established for the first time at Tirana University. Thus the brand new Albanian psychologists face different unknown challenges for the Albanian context.

In Albania there is an immediate need to conduct research in different contexts where psychologists might have an essential role. This study aims at understanding better the settings of daycares, especially Durrës daycares. In Albania, Tirana and Durrës daycares have psychologists in their working staff. In fact in Durrës the psychologist is working for nearly one year, while in Tirana psychologists are working for nearly 7 years. There is a need to make further studies analyzing the differences of daycares in the cities and the capital of Albania.

As it was mentioned earlier, this study aims at analyzing how the role of the psychologist in Durrës daycares is perceived by educators and parents. Based on the information taken by semi-structured interviews, parents and educators do agree that psychologists need to be part of daycares' staff. However, when they are asked how can psychologists be helpful with their work in daycares, some parents and educators are confused about their role.

The perception that parents and educators have for the role of the psychologist in Durrës daycares gives us a framework of how parents and educators, these important social agents, understand the functions of daycares' psychologists and help us understand better those aspects of the psychologists work in daycares that need to be more evident.

By understanding better the way parents and educators perceive the role of daycares' psychologists; they can build alliances in daycares by enhancing the quality of children's experiences with caregivers.

In conclusion, in this study some very important functions of daycares' psychologists are manifested.

Methods

In this study the method that has been used to take the information in the field is the semi-structured interview with parents and educators in two daycares in Durrës. The aim of the semi-structured interviews has been to take static information like age, profession and information that measures the attitudes of parents and educators for different issues on child development. This article put emphasis on two important questions that measure the perception of parents and educators in daycares:

- a) Is the role of psychologists necessary in daycares?
- b) According to your opinion, what might be the responsibilities of daycares' psychologists?

All in all, there have been taken 14 interviews with educators and 25 with parents. The time when most educators have been taken in interviews was during the shift exchange, while some educators have been interviewed after the children have finished their breakfast or during the lunch break. The researcher has taken the directors consent before conducting the interview in the daycares. Also, before the interviews took place, the educators have been informed that the interviews' aim is only for research purposes and their confidentiality will be kept. The interviews with educators have been conducted in groups made of 2, 3 or 4 educators.

Parents have been interviewed during the time they have left their children at daycares or when they came to take their children. Before the interview would begin, the scopes of the interview have been clarified to parents. They have been informed

how long the interview would be as well. Parents have been interviewed in the hall of daycares. Even though the place of the interview has not been adaptable, because in some cases there have been different noises and parents were not so comfortable standing up. However, most of the parents have shown high interest to answer all the questions of the interview.

During the interviews of parents and educators, the researcher has taken notes especially during those moments when parents or educators have given very detailed information when answering the questions. After the interviews, the researcher has written most of the information taken during the interviews. One of the disadvantages of taking notes has been losing one part of the information while taking notes.

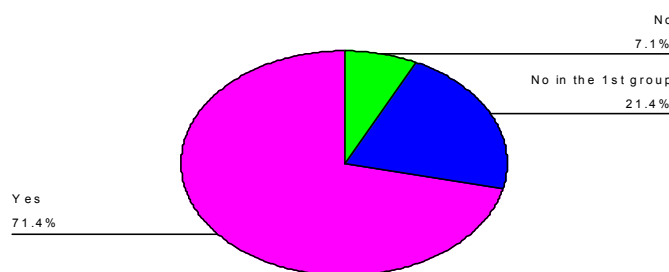
Results

The results taken from the semi-structured interview questions: “Is the role of psychologist necessary in daycares?” and “According to your opinion, what might be the responsibilities of daycares’ psychologists?” are summarized in the below graphs.

In the first graph are summarized the responses taken from educators, while in the second graph are summarized the responses taken from parents.

From 14 educators being interviewed, 10 educators see the role of psychologists necessary in daycares principally when children have developmental delays. 3 educators response is that daycares’ psychologists are needed in daycares, but only in the oldest groups not in the youngest groups (the youngest group is made of children from 6 months to 1.5 years old). 1 educator responds that the role of psychologists is not necessary in daycares.

Is the role of psychologist necessary in daycares?
Educators' attitudes



Graph 1

The second graph presents an overview of parents' attitudes when asking the questions: "Is the psychologists' role necessary in daycares?" From 25 parents interviewed in two daycares of Durrës, 22 parents claim that psychologists should be part of daycares' staff, while 3 parents state that the role of psychologists in daycares is not necessary for their children. When the 22 parents are asked that what might be the responsibilities of psychologists in daycares, the answers have been different. From 22 parents, 10 parents state that one of the most important responsibilities of psychologists is to deal with children that suffer from developmental delays. 7 parents have claimed that the role of psychologists is important in daycares but however they don't have any clear answer about the responsibilities of the psychologists' role in daycares. 2 parents have asserted that psychologists' role in daycares is very necessary and one of the important functions of psychologists in daycares is to help children that come for the first time in daycares to adapt with the new environment. 2 parents have declared that psychologists need to be part of daycares because they have more knowledge how to care for children. 1 parent states that the role of psychologists is important in daycares but however the parents have doubts about the skills of Albanian psychologists. According to this parent, psychologists in daycares have a pivotal role in caring for young children and he needs to be very professional and responsible in his work.



Graph 2

From these data it is observed that 71.4% of the educators claim that psychologists need to be part of the daycares' staff, 21.4% of educators claim that psychologists are needed in the third group, the group of the oldest children and not in

the other groups. 7.1% of educators claim that the role of psychologists is not important in daycares.

On the other hand, it is observed that 88% of the parents interviewed have declared that psychologists need to be part of the daycares' staff and 12% of parents have declared that the role of psychologists is not important in daycares.

From 14 educators that have been interviewed, 10 educators have expressed that the main functions of psychologists are related with intervening in those cases when children show development delays or autism.

Discussion

From the results, it is examined that most of the interviewed parents and educators see the role of psychologists necessary in the daycares settings. This fact signifies that most parents and educators are aware that when caring for children they need to have an alliance with psychologists as well. When parents and educators are asked which might be some of the functions of psychologists' role in daycares, they do have an ambiguous perception of the psychologists' role in daycares. This might be due to the Durrës' daycares context. Further studies need to be conducted in different cities and the capital of Albania. There is only one psychologist in Durrës that is responsible for the three daycares in Durrës city. The psychologist is working for nearly 10 months. These working conditions make even more challenging the role of the psychologist in Durrës' daycares. However, parents and educators are aware of one of the important function daycares' psychologists have, which is detecting and intervening when children show development delays. Psychologists in daycares, in accordance with their qualifications identify children that have developmental delays, but even children that have other psychological problems. The daycares' psychologists make psychological assessments, take information from the family members, educators and then create an intervening plan for the child based on this information. If the daycares' psychologists do not have the right qualification to diagnose or to intervene with a treating plan, the psychologist identifies children with psychological problems or developmental delays and recommends the cases in specialized centers. Psychologists in daycares build alliances with pediatrics, social workers so as to identify different factors that might be the cause of the psychological disorders or development delays.

Another important function of psychologists in daycares is to build alliances with educators and parents so as to enhance the quality of care and the quality of the experiences during the hours children stay at daycares and at home.

Building alliance with educators consists of several important aspects of the psychologists' work and educators' work:

- a) The daycares' psychologists help educators to put into practice the goals of the daycare curricula and identify problems that arise when following the goals of the curricula in specific contexts.
- b) The daycares' psychologists consult educators when diverse problems arise during their work with the children.
- c) The daycares' psychologists support emotionally educators in those cases when educators feel consumed by their work and have high level of stress because of their work.
- d) The daycares' psychologists guide educators in specific interventions that are undertaken with children that show developmental delays, developmental disorders or psychological problems.

During the field work in Durrës' daycares, it has been observed that one of the biggest challenges educators faced was putting into practice the objective of daycares' curricula. The daycares' curriculum is a new concept for educators. They have been working for a long time without a curriculum. The psychologist of Durrës' daycares has introduced the educators with a curriculum which educators need to follow during their work with children. This fact shows that the psychologist of Durrës' daycares has undertaken courageous and important initiatives during his work. On the other hand, putting into practice the objectives of the curriculum requires time and patient. First of all, daycares' psychologists should understand better the unique needs of educators during their work, the context where they work. Secondly, daycares' psychologists should adapt the objectives of curriculum with the specific needs that come through during educators' work in the context they are putting into practice the objectives of the curriculum.

Building alliance with parents consists of several important aspects of the psychologists' work:

- a) Consulting parents for dilemmas parents might have of their role as parents and dilemmas that are related with the stages of development of their children.
- b) Consulting parents that belong to vulnerable groups. In vulnerable groups are included parents that have poor living conditions due to economical problems, parents without an education, parents who have show high level of depression or who abuse their children, parents that have problems with addiction like alcohol, drug addiction etc.
- c) Training parents to identify their parenting style and their children temperament. By training parents, they become more aware of the factors that influence the nature of the interaction with their children.
- d) Guiding parents to engage in activities with their children that enhance motor development, cognitive development and psychosocial development.

From the obtained results it is noticed that even though parents and educators do have some ambiguity of the psychologist' role in Durrës' daycares, most of the parents and educators do perceive that psychologists should be part of the daycares' staff. According to the information taken from the interviews, the psychologist' presence is felt especially in the innovative activities of the curriculum and in helping the youngest children to adapt with the new environment of daycares. These facts demonstrate that most parents and educators, even though they might be ambiguous, they do perceive the psychologist' role in Durrës' daycares as necessary.

As discussed above, the daycares' psychologist can intervene directly by being trained in children therapies, but even indirectly, by collaborating with the child's most important caregivers: parents and educators.

To conclude, this study has revealed the role and the important duties of daycares' psychologist. Only with constant, hard work and with an immense desire to face the challenges of the brand new profession, the daycares' psychologist will build enduring alliances with parents, educators and the future.

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