

Counselling Services for the Sexuality of Youth with Neurodevelopment Disorders

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Rationale: The sexual and reproductive rights of young people with neurodevelopmental disabilities have not yet been achieved and are not yet well implemented in Portugal. People with neurodevelopmental disabilities face multiple and specific barriers throughout their development, hampering the experience of living a dignified, equal and respectful sexuality. Such barriers include access to information on sexuality issues, such as sexual physiology and functions, sexual orientation, risk behaviours and face negative attitude among caretakers, families and other professionals. In 2009 the Centre for Child Development Diferenças founded the sexuality services for people and families affected by neurodevelopmental disorder, such as trissomy 21, autism spectrum disorders, developmental cognitive disorder, Williams syndrome, among other. The service is now managed by two professionals from Sexology studies) who work in collaboration with paediatricians, rehabilitation professionals, educational psychologists and pedopsychiatrist. The service provided is mainly counselling for families and youth and training for teachers, professionals or family members.

Research question: This study seeks to described the sexuality issues occurring in our Counselling Services for the Sexuality of Youth with Neurodevelopment Disorders.

Method and Results: Based on 7 cases of trisomy 21; 4 autism spectrum disorder; one with DAMP syndrome; 3 cognitive development disorder; and 4 other cases with non specific disorders, we characterize the main behavioural and sexual issues that motivated the use of the sexuality services.

Conclusions: To implement and guarantee the sexual and reproductive rights and health of people with neurodevelopment disorders, specific actions with and their careers and professionals to overcome the prejudice are needed. Social integration in communities should also include actions to improve sexuality concerns, relationships and intimacy, including sexual opportunities and sexual knowledge. In Portugal specific support is needed to address couples, parenthood and other relationship structures in this population.

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