

Learning theories and the teaching process: Religious education and social support networks in autistic children

Abstract

The present study defined the following question as a research problem: How important are social support networks as a fundamental element in the lives of autistic children who have learning difficulties? In order to answer this question and enable a greater understanding of the topic, the general objective was to discuss the importance of social support networks as mediators in the development of autistic children who have learning difficulties. More specifically, the aim is to: conceptualize learning difficulties; specify which are the main social support networks in childhood; demonstrate how social support networks are relevant in children's lives; present the importance of social support networks in situations of autistic children with learning difficulties. As a method, it adopted bibliographical review, this form of research seeks to get in touch with subjects and other studies that have been carried out, approaching the chosen topic. The conclusions showed that the support provided by social networks to autistic students has been significant in supporting families with low social vulnerability, due to their influence on the development and well-being of people throughout their lives. Thus, the social support network is a set of systems and significant people, which make up the relationship links received and perceived by the individual.

Keywords: network, support, social, religious education, learning, autistic

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Introduction

This study looks at the role of social support networks as mediators in the development of autistic children who face learning difficulties. To this end, the research initially sought to understand two fundamental concepts related to the subject: learning difficulties and social support networks.¹

Issues associated with self-regulation, interaction and social perception may be related to these difficulties, but are not considered in themselves a barrier to learning. The definition of these difficulties is influenced by intelligence quotient (IQ) and is related to internal and external variables, which can impact on cognitive, affective, social and creative areas.²

According to Felipe and Benevenitti, these difficulties are related to psychological and/or sociocultural aspects and are not exclusively child-centered, as they can be identified in children whose learning difficulties are not solely due to neurological problems. This implies that environmental factors, such as problems at school or in the family, also play an important role. Learning difficulties can have a primary or secondary origin. Primary origin is related to non-psychoneurological factors, such as difficulties in reading, language, writing and mathematics. Secondary origin is linked to biological, behavioral and emotional changes.³

In the context of the support network, according to Bronfenbrenner, it must address the changes that occur throughout life, not only in the

person, but also in their ecological environment, in their interactions and in their growing capacity to understand, sustain or modify the characteristics of the environment and their relationships.⁴

The social support network is one of the main determining factors for resilience. According to Siqueira et al., the social support network is a set of systems and significant people that make up the relationship ties perceived and received by the individual.⁵

The support provided by social networks has been the subject of study in psychology due to its influence on people's development and subjective well-being throughout their lives. The affective component has been incorporated into this concept, recognizing the undeniable value of the affective bond for the formation and maintenance of support and protection. Social support is related to the relationships a person establishes in life and can significantly influence the definition of their personality and development.⁶

Given this context, this study defined the following question as its research problem: What is the relevance of social support networks as a fundamental element in the lives of autistic children who face learning difficulties?

In order to answer this question and provide a more in-depth understanding of the topic, the general objective was to discuss the importance of social support networks as mediators in the development of autistic children who face learning difficulties. Specifically, it aims to conceptualize learning difficulties, specify the main social support networks in childhood, demonstrate the relevance of social

¹Britto R, Koller SH. Desenvolvimento humano e redes de apoio social e afetivo. In Carvalho AM, editors. *O mundo social da criança: Natureza e cultura em ação*. São Paulo, Brasil: Casa do Psicólogo. 1999; p. 115–129.

²Evangelista VMA, Constantino EP. The relevance of social support networks during childhood. *Estudos*. 2013;17:217–232.

³Felipe SM, Benevenutti ZS. Learning Difficulties. *Maiêutica*. 2013;1(1):61–64.

⁴Bronfenbrenner U. *An ecologia do desenvolvimento humano*. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas. 1996.

⁵Siqueira, Aline Cardoso, Betts, et al. A Rede de apoio social e afetivo de adolescentes institucionalizados no sul do Brasil. *Revista Interamericana de Psicologia*. 2006;40(2):149–158.

⁶Bronfenbrenner. 1996: p. 34.

support networks in children's lives and present the importance of social support networks in situations involving autistic children with learning difficulties.

The justification for this topic lies in the fact that the importance attributed to learning problems has led schools and families to worry about them and seek solutions. This concern has increased as these problems become more evident in schools, where there is a strong link between academic performance and professional success. These aspects become part of school demand, and many children who don't fit into the "natural" learning patterns are referred to and treated by psychologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, neuropsychiatrists and other professionals who assess these issues.⁷

As for the method, a literature review was adopted, which seeks to explore different aspects and studies related to the chosen topic. Thus, according to the aforementioned authors, bibliographic research is not limited to repeating what has already been said or written on a given subject, but seeks to examine a topic from new perspectives, approaches or approaches, with diverse and innovative conclusions.⁸

Literature review

An understanding of autism in schools

The causes of autism are still not fully understood, but there are several theories, the most widely accepted being the multifactorial theory. It suggests that genetic, immunological (such as maternal rubella) and neurological (such as encephalitis and meningitis) factors play a role in causing autism. Unfortunately, the inclusion of children with disabilities is often only related to those who do not require significant restructuring or adaptation of the school. Children with marked cognitive deficits, such as autistic and psychotic children, are often not considered in terms of their educational capabilities.⁹

Until early 2013, the manuals used by professionals to diagnose autism were the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). These manuals used terms such as Global Developmental Disorder (GDD) and Invasive Developmental Disorder (IDD), respectively.

Currently, the DSM-V describes these cases as Autism Spectrum Disorder, eliminating subcategories such as Asperger's Syndrome or Autistic Disorder. According to this manual, people with ASD have persistent deficits in communication, social interaction and restrictive and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests or activities.¹⁰

Early diagnosis is crucial for education, making the role of the teacher fundamental. During school age, when children's social interaction intensifies, it is possible to observe their unique behavioral characteristics more clearly. When teaching students on the autistic spectrum, there is no specific methodology or technique. However, there are ample learning possibilities. Teaching doesn't have to be rigidly tied to formal functions or the predefined limits of the curriculum. The school must connect with the student's reality, and a good teacher knows a student's abilities and work better than anyone.

According to Cunha, autism encompasses a set of behaviors grouped into a main triad: communication deficits, difficulties in social interaction and restrictive and repetitive behaviors.¹¹

As a person with autism acquires experiences in the social world, they can manifest stereotyped and unique behaviors, because the environment can trigger a variety of stimuli, resulting in reactions that are more impulsive than rational. It is essential to get to know the student in order to establish priorities. The school activity report begins with an assessment to determine their abilities and identify which skills they need to develop. Depending on the degree of impairment, efforts may need to be made to develop basic and motor skills. Autism, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is defined as:

A developmental disorder, with no cure and severely disabling. Its incidence is five cases per 10,000 births if a strict classification criterion is adopted, and three times higher if correlated cases are considered, i.e. those requiring the same type of care.¹²

Because it is a serious disorder, autism is often perceived as a crippling condition for pre-teens. It is common to associate them with a limited psychology, even though they face intellectual difficulties. The autistic behavior pattern brings rigidity to various aspects of daily life, whether in new activities or in habitual routines and play. This can become a challenge for teaching. A world full of responsibilities and surprises can be disturbing and confusing for them, hence the importance of the security they find in routine, which can become a positive tool, creating opportunities for learning.

Inclusive schools propose a model for the education system that takes into account the needs of all students and is structured according to those needs. However, in practice, there is not always planning and implementation of programs for different students in mainstream school environments. Within this approach, a child with autism can be included in this environment, as long as it is stimulating and suited to their needs.¹³

The inclusion movement aims to ensure that no student is left out of mainstream education from the start of schooling, proposing that the school adapts to the student. According to Mazzota¹⁴:

Inclusion implies the school's commitment to educating every child. Thus, the proposal for inclusion contemplates the pedagogy of diversity, since all students should be in the mainstream school, regardless of their social, ethnic or linguistic background. Thus, in order to implement inclusion, the model proposed is inspired by the kaleidoscope, in which each piece is important to ensure the beauty and richness of the whole, i.e. it is desirable for there to be all kinds of students in the mainstream class so that the group is enriched. To this end, the school must be creative in finding solutions. Aiming to keep these students in the mainstream classroom, leading them to achieve satisfactory results in their academic and social performance.

It can therefore be seen that the concept of an inclusive society is gradually being implemented in various parts of the world, as a natural consequence of the process of applying the general principles

⁷Ohlweiler I. Introdução aos transtornos da aprendizagem. In Rotta, NT., Ohlweiler, L., Riesgo RS, editors. *Transtornos da aprendizagem: abordagem neurobiológica e multidisciplinar*. Porto Alegre: Artmed. 2016.

⁸Marconi MA, Lakatos EM. *Técnicas de pesquisa: planejamento e execução de pesquisas, amostragens e técnicas de pesquisas, elaboração, análise e interpretação de dados*. São Paulo: Atlas. 2007: p. 28.

⁹Piassa. 2010: p. 56.

¹⁰DSM V. 2014. p. 54.

¹¹Cunha Eugênio. *Práticas Pedagógicas para Inclusão e Diversidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WAK. 2014. p. 20.

¹²Mantoan, Maria Tereza Eglér. *Inclusão escolar: O que é? Por quê? Como fazer?* São Paulo: Moderna, 2003. p. 13.

¹³Assumpção junior, Francisco Bapata, Evelyn K. *Autismo Infantil*. 2nd ed. São Paulo: Editora Atheneu, 2018.

¹⁴Mazzota. 1996. p. 45.

of human rights in various areas, such as the labor market, leisure, recreation, sports, tourism, culture, religion, the arts, family and education.

Finally, when addressing the challenges and perspectives of inclusive education, it is important to highlight that when focusing on students with special educational needs, it is clear that inequality is legitimized by the lack of equality in the conditions and opportunities for access, entry and permanence in the school system.

Learning theories for students with disabilities (ASD)

In the psycho-pedagogical approach, it is crucial to identify the autistic student's preferences and interests in order to create appropriate teaching strategies. It is possible to establish communication channels that enrich the pedagogical process. The teacher plays an important role by offering encouragement and positive feedback after tasks have been completed, including incorporating activities in which the student already has skills in order to maintain the focus of interest throughout the educational experience.¹⁵

In the same context, Kiguel¹⁶ states that:

Historically, Psychopedagogy emerged on the border between Pedagogy and Psychology, based on the need to care for children with 'learning disorders', considered to be unfit for the conventional educational system. These etiological factors used to explain alarming rates of school failure involved almost exclusively individual factors such as malnutrition, neurological and psychological problems, etc.

The distinction between learning and development is clarified in Piaget's "Biology and Knowledge" (1967). Learning is related to content, while development is linked to forms. Some theorists argue that learning contributes to development, but it is important to distinguish the type of learning they are referring to. For Piaget, learning influences development by allowing the cognitive system to find new ways of interpreting reality as it learns.¹⁷

Some scholars also argue that learning is intrinsically linked to development, as they are very similar or even identical processes. However, there are those who see learning as an unbalanced and fundamentally conflictual process, where the individual faces and resolves cognitive conflicts, thus creating alternatives and mental instruments needed to deal with the situation in question.¹⁸

Piaget's theory favors this latter perspective, understanding that learning is deeply intertwined with development, as it leads the cognitive system to discover new ways of interpreting reality during the learning process. In this context, concepts such as equilibration, awareness (conceptualization), inductive and constructive generalization, as well as the formation of possibilities, as addressed by Piaget, offer interesting contributions for those interested in this interpretation of the cognitive system.¹⁹

In terms of constructivism, one can follow what is highlighted by Cunha²⁰

The process of a clinical psychological diagnosis follows a number of steps to arrive at the final results. The first is to ask questions related to the reasons for the consultation and to define the hypotheses and

objectives of the examination. This is followed by the planning, selection and use of instruments for the examination. There is also the integration of data, information and the formulation of interferences by integrating the data, with the initial hypotheses and objectives as a point of reference. The assessment ends with the communication of the data obtained and guidance on the case.

A typical child absorbs knowledge naturally, mainly through play and interactions with parents, peers and teachers at school. During these interactions, they develop motor, cognitive and social skills, forming their impressions of the world around them. It is therefore crucial to consider that when choosing and applying strategies for people with autism, it is necessary to take into account their individual variations in abilities and difficulties related to social, linguistic, cognitive and motor development.²¹

Constructivism initially offered tools for dealing with learning difficulties, promoting a conception of the human being that transformed attitudes towards these difficulties. Psychopedagogical projective techniques make it possible to analyze how an individual's life history influences their learning process. For example, the Educational Family Drawing technique aims to study the relationship between learning and family dynamics.²²

Understanding that knowledge is not just a simple acquisition based on information and that learning involves the gradual and autonomous construction of knowledge relieves children of the guilt of any learning difficulties. It is essential to recognize that learning is a continuous process that involves the individual's ability to construct their own understanding over time.²³

When parents seek educational or religious support for their children, they are often trying to resolve a learning difficulty in a specific area of knowledge. However, it is crucial to consider that this difficulty is part of a complex cognitive system with specific operating mechanisms. Ignoring this aspect means neglecting years of research into the functioning of this system and its nuances.²⁴

In addition, it is essential to document the results obtained during the intervention, allowing for critical reflection on the work carried out. This is essential to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the intervention, whether it is carried out in the school context to reduce academic maladaptation or in other settings. It is crucial to understand not only the students' final results, but also the production process, identifying where and how errors occur.

According to Weiss²⁵:

The search for help and the start of care is in itself an intervention in family dynamics in relation to life learning. At the very least, the parents reflect on the past, searching for the beginning of the patient's life, which spontaneously includes a return to the family's own life as a whole.

Certain approaches, such as the use of games, playful activities and role-plays, also have the potential to lead students to reflect on their mistakes and adopt new approaches. In games, which are common in religious education, a wrong move can become a valuable learning

¹⁵ Brito. 2019. p. 17.

¹⁶ Kiguel. 1991. p. 22.

¹⁷ Brasil. Ministério da Saúde. Diretrizes de Atenção à Reabilitação da Pessoa com Transtornos do Espectro do Autismo (TEA). Brasília: MS. 2013.

¹⁸ CUNHA, Eugênio. Autismo e Inclusão. 3rd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WAK, 2011.

¹⁹ Piaget. 1986. p. 12.

²⁰ CUNHA, 2000, p. 87.

²¹ MITTLER, Peter. Educação inclusiva: contextos sociais. In: Preparando todos os professores para ensinar a todos os alunos. São Paulo: Artmed, 2003.

²² WILLIAMS, C., WRUGHT, E. Convivendo com o autismo e a síndrome de Asperger, São Paulo, M. Books, 2008.

²³ PALHARES, Marina Silveira e MARINE, Simone. Escola Inclusiva. São Carlos: EduFScar, 2002.

²⁴ ROMERO, Priscila. O Aluno Autista. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WAK, 2016.

²⁵ WEISS, M^a Lúcia L. - Psicopedagogia Clínica - Uma visão diagnóstica dos problemas de aprendizagem escolar - Rio de Janeiro: DP & A, 1997, p. 48.

opportunity. Correcting a mistake involves comparing different hypotheses, analyzing their consequences and thus opening up space for the development of new ideas and knowledge.

When planning interventions, it is essential to avoid proposing broad and ambitious changes. Small modifications have the potential to generate more consistent and reliable effects. As highlighted by Weiss²⁶, the following are some suggestions that can be considered during the intervention process:

- Acting to change teachers' expectations and attitudes towards students' failure at school.
- Encourage the formation of teams of teachers to form a common project, a more democratic school to reduce teaching-learning problems.
- Consider the students' social background as a starting point when reworking content.
- Study the socio-cultural and psychological characteristics of children.
- Re-reading and re-elaboration in the development of curricular programs.
- Non-standardized psycho-pedagogical assessment.
- Adequate mediation, helping learners to reflect on their actions and change them.
- As in any situation, it is necessary to establish a good bond, without which there are no conditions for development.

These and other considerations lead to new constructions, constantly aiming to contribute to diagnosis and psychopedagogical interventions in the school context. The study reveals that psychopedagogy, despite its breadth and complexity, is making significant progress in the search for a distinct identity, specific actions, theoretical foundations and applicability. Although it is a relatively new field, psychopedagogy is supported by various scientific disciplines.²⁷

The evolution of psychopedagogy in Brazil reflects the need to deal with the problem of school failure. Initially, its focus was on the symptoms of learning difficulties, such as inattention, disinterest, slowness and asthenia. Its aim was to remedy these symptoms, treating learning difficulties as mere poor performance to be corrected. In this context, psychology and pedagogy were seen as independent elements, with psychology acting mainly as a promoter, normative and regulator of intellectual life.²⁸

Therefore, research, analysis and the development of new approaches to transformation are essential aspects to which religious education is dedicated. It is desirable that schools can count on professionals prepared to rethink these issues and intervene in order to prevent educational problems.

The training and preparation of religious education teachers in dealing with autistic students at school

The training and preparation of religious education teachers play a crucial role in identifying specific characteristics in students' behavior. This factor can make a huge difference, as it allows for early

²⁶WEISS, 1997, p. 49.

²⁷ALMEIDA, Mariangela Lima de, MARTINS, Ines de Oliveira Ramos. *Prática pedagógica inclusiva: A diferença como possibilidade/* Vitória, ES: GM: 2009, p. 67.

²⁸FALCÃO, Gérson Marinho. *Psicologia da aprendizagem*. 3. ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1986, p. 38.

intervention that promotes greater independence and quality of life, regardless of the student's degree of autism.

The school environment stands out as the ideal place for precise observations. In any intervention, it is essential that teachers are aware of their students' educational capabilities, even when they initially show difficulties in adapting.

To achieve this goal, it is essential to select effective methods that make the school curriculum compatible with the needs of each student. The difficulties faced by religious education teachers when dealing with autistic students are often considerable and can manifest as anxiety and conflict when facing what is perceived as "different".²⁹

In this context, the first step is to acquire knowledge about general concepts and understand the characteristics of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in order to plan assessments and interventions that meet the learning needs of these students. Autism has been the subject of increasing study and questioning, but still remains unknown to many educators. It is important to recognize that the autism spectrum covers a wide range of support levels and symptoms that manifest in childhood.³⁰

It is essential to understand how students with autism communicate, behave, feel, perceive the world around them and, above all, how they learn. A crucial point to consider is mediation, a process of pedagogical intervention that can be approached by the religious education teacher, which aims to improve the student's relationship with knowledge, promoting interaction. Mediation transforms the intention to teach into teaching practice and the willingness to learn into effective learning.

Therefore, in mediation, teachers use activities that are aligned with each student's profile, taking into account their qualities, difficulties, shortcomings and challenges. In addition, mediation has an evaluative character, since each task completed opens the way to new objectives and, consequently, new evaluations. Mediation is a pedagogical movement that requires constant observation and evaluation, and pedagogical practice is based on this interaction between these three fundamental actions.³¹

Results and discussion

Religious education and its relationship with autism

In the field of religious education, it is essential to consider various aspects before approaching a specific case. This includes assessing the stage of development of the school to which the student is attached, the school's perception of the student, the cross-cutting themes covered, the curriculum, the assessment criteria and the pedagogical project in place. The religious education teacher is a professional dedicated to supporting educational institutions, with the aim of helping other professionals and providing a deeper understanding of the complexity of the teaching and learning process.³²

When a school refers an autistic student for specialized educational care, it is common to involve not only special education professionals, but also the religious education teacher, in order to provide

²⁹BRITO, Maria Claudia. *Estratégias Práticas de Intervenção nos Transtornos do Espectro do Autismo*. E-Book Saber Autismo, 2019, p. 56.

³⁰CUNHA, Eugênio. *Autismo na Escola*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora WAK, 2013.

³¹CUNHA, Marcus Vinicius da. *Psicologia da educação*. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 2000.

³²Rogério Augusto S. *O Ensino religioso na instituição escolar: Intervenções Psicopedagógicas no processo de ensino-aprendizagem*. 2012. http://www.psicopedagogiabrasil.com.br/artigos_rogerio_pp_institucional.htm. Acesso em 2 de setembro de 2023.

individualized attention to this student. This is partly due to the fact that people with autism may have less control over their impulses, especially when they are affected by external stimuli. It is crucial to create opportunities for these students to develop skills to overcome these challenges. Identifying these opportunities requires a keen eye and detailed observation.³³

Evaluation, before being a simple attribution of value, represents an objective action aimed at understanding the student's behavior in the face of teaching and learning strategies in an inclusive way, in which it allows the student's performance to be verified, being fundamental for the planning of subsequent stages.³⁴

According to Ferreira, religious education seeks not only to improve academic performance, but also to promote the flowering of new needs and stimulate the desire to learn. However, it is important to recognize that religious education teachers have limitations in their field and cannot cover all the pedagogical, psychological, neurological, phonoaudiological, psycholinguistic and other aspects related to psychopedagogy.³⁵

The religious education teacher plays a fundamental role as a curricular component of the social support network at school, facilitating the adaptation of students with ASD. Their preparation should also include the ability to assist children and adolescents with learning difficulties, contributing to prevention and intervention in the teaching process of these students. Therefore, the religious education teacher becomes an essential link in the learning process when the school refers a student with autism for specialized educational care, because religious education works with the phenomenological values of religion in an inclusive way. By working on the vast Brazilian religious phenomenology, we automatically work on respecting differences and supporting all existing socio-cultural demands, especially the disabilities and comorbidities of the student with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder).³⁶

In addition, it is the role of the religious education teacher to be properly prepared to assist children and adolescents who face learning difficulties, with the aim of preventing problems and intervening in the teaching process of these students in an inclusive way, without differentiating them, regardless of social reasons or disability, making the religious education teacher a fundamental link in the learning process.³⁷

Children, young people and adults with autism often have less control over their impulses when they are strongly affected by external stimuli. It is therefore crucial to create opportunities for these people to develop strategies to overcome these challenges. This search for opportunities and revealing them requires close and detailed observation.

Likewise, assessment, before being just a value assignment, represents an objective action aimed at understanding the student's behavior in relation to teaching and learning strategies. It makes it possible to check the student's performance and is essential for planning the next steps in the educational process in an inclusive way, including the student with ASD without damaging their teaching-learning process.

³³Assumpção Junior, Kuczynski. 2018. p. 56.

³⁴Assumpção Junior, Kuczynski. 2018. p. 67.

³⁵Ferreira, Maria Clotilde Rossetti. Os fazeres na Educação Infantil. 6th ed. São Paulo: Cortez. 2003. p. 141.

³⁶Santos, 2012. p. 45.

³⁷Sassaky, 1997. p. 34.

Social support networks

The social support network is a combination of the concepts of "social network" and "social support", both of which are interconnected but have their own distinctions. The social network, as defined by Dessen, is a system made up of various social elements, such as people, functions (or activities carried out by these people) and contexts, which offer support in various forms, such as financial resources, emotional empathy and guidance and information, to meet the needs of the individual. The social network encompasses institutions such as schools, universities, the state, health facilities and all other organizations that contribute socially to the well-being of the individual.³⁸

The social support provided by networks involves mutual support, which is strengthened when the social network is cohesive and integrated. This includes sharing information, helping in times of difficulty and taking part in social events. Involvement in the community, for example, can positively impact self-confidence, life satisfaction and the ability to cope with challenges. In the context of illness, the social support available motivates the will to live and raises self-esteem, contributing to successful treatment.

In addition, social support encompasses personal aspects and interactions of the individual, shaping their personality and development. This emotional support is maintained by affective ties and depends on the individual's perceptions of their social environment, as well as the skills and resources available for their protection.³⁹

The social support network as a whole is dynamic and plays a crucial role at all stages of a person's life, influencing their health and well-being. It facilitates adaptation to stressful situations and emotional imbalances and acts as a support in difficult times, helping to overcome challenges.⁴⁰

Therefore, the effectiveness of the social support network is reflected in the reduction of psychopathological symptoms, such as feelings of helplessness and depression, as well as strengthening skills, such as a sense of belonging and the quality of relationships. The absence of this network can increase vulnerability to situations of risk and exposure to violence, since interruptions in affective bonds and conflicts in relationships can cause both physical and psychological disorders, given people's intrinsic need to establish stable affective bonds.⁴¹

Social support network and risk and protective factors in the learning difficulties of students with ASD

The quality of interactions in different social contexts is a determining factor for people's physical and emotional health, and can have a positive or negative influence on their lives. These interactions can be considered risk or protective factors throughout individuals' lives.⁴²

³⁸Juliano MCC, Yunes MAM. Reflexões sobre rede de apoio social como mecanismo de proteção e promoção de resiliência. *Ambiente e Sociedade*. 2014;17(3):135–154.

³⁹Rosa TEDC, Benício MHDA. As redes sociais e de apoio: o conviver e a sua influência sobre a saúde. *BIS. Boletim do Instituto de Saúde (Impresso)*. 2009;47:80–83.

⁴⁰Seibel, Bruna Larissa, Falceto, et al. Rede de apoio social e funcionamento familiar: estudo longitudinal sobre famílias em vulnerabilidade social. *Pensando famílias*. 2017;21(1):120–136.

⁴¹Juliano, Yunes. 2014. p. 59.

⁴²Juliano, Yunes. 2014. p. 62.

Risk factors are stressful events which, when present, increase the likelihood of a person facing emotional, social and physical problems. It is important to note that these factors are not limited to the family. Although the family is a fundamental support network in childhood, other influences and ecological contexts interact throughout the life cycle, as observed in Bronfenbrenner's analysis.⁴³

In some cases, these factors can affect children's development, damaging cognitive, emotional and social aspects. For example, parents with low levels of education may not see the value of education and, consequently, may not encourage their children to dedicate themselves to their studies. This can be particularly critical for children with learning difficulties, given the socially vulnerable circumstances in which they live.⁴⁴

Children and adolescents in situations of social vulnerability experience the negative consequences of social inequalities, including poverty, social exclusion and lack of access to education, work, health, leisure, food and culture. These challenges increase the likelihood that they will face school performance and behavioral problems.⁴⁵

School plays a crucial role in the development of children and adolescents, as it is the place where they spend most of their lives and interact with different peers. In addition to the family, school contributes to humanization, education, autonomy and a sense of belonging to the social group.⁴⁶

It is essential that educators, parents and friends understand learning processes and avoid taboos and stereotypes when dealing with children who face difficulties in this area. The support of psychologists and school professionals is invaluable in guiding not only children, but also parents and teachers. Educators, family members and friends who don't know how to deal with a child with learning difficulties can cause them much greater problems. For these reasons and others, it is very important that psychologists who work in the school area seek out information to learn how to help not only these children, but also their parents and teachers.⁴⁷

In this context, social support networks play a crucial role, especially for children with learning difficulties. Emotional support helps these children develop self-esteem and competence. The responsibility lies with the family and the school.⁴⁸

Therefore, lasting social ties are essential to offer help in times of need and to help people cope with crises. Human biology and social interactions are interconnected, and these biological and environmental aspects can act as protective factors and promote resilience.⁴⁹

⁴³Yunes MAM, Garcia NM, Albuquerque BDM. Monoparentalidade, pobreza e resiliência: entre as crenças dos profissionais e as possibilidades da convivência familiar. 2007.

⁴⁴Simão AMV, Frison LMB. Autorregulação da aprendizagem: abordagens teóricas e desafios para as práticas em contextos educativos. *Cadernos de Educação*. 2013;(45):2–20.

⁴⁵Pereira PC, Santos ABD, Williams LCDA. Desempenho escolar da criança vitimizada encaminhada ao fórum judicial. *Psicologia: Teoria e pesquisa*. 2009;25(1):19–28.

⁴⁶Ferreira, Cássia Trivellato M, Marturano, et al. Ambiente familiar e os problemas do comportamento apresentados por crianças com baixo desempenho escolar. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*. 2002;15(1):35–44

⁴⁷Andrade SA, Santos DN, Bastos AC, et al. Ambiente familiar e desenvolvimento cognitivo infantil: uma abordagem epidemiológica. *Revista de saúde Pública*, 2005;39:606–611

⁴⁸Polity E. Dificuldade de Aprendizagem e Família: Construindo Novas Narrativas. São Paulo: Vetor. 2001.

⁴⁹Polity E. 2001. p. 34.

Final considerations

After completing this study, it became clear that social networks play a significant role in supporting families facing social vulnerability, impacting the development and well-being of people throughout their lives, especially children, young people and adults with autism. The social support network comprises significant systems and people who form the relationship links perceived and received by the individual.

Religious education plays a role in education and in the social support network by helping to reduce school and social failure. This is achieved by supporting parents, teachers and students, encouraging joint development. It can be seen that psychopedagogical work has a greater focus on the day-to-day reality of the school, and referrals to consulting rooms occur mainly when the diagnosis identifies that learning difficulties are related to emotional and psychological issues.

In this context, psycho-pedagogical work must take into account life history, covering not only family relationships, but also the school trajectory, especially when religious education is involved in the institution. The education of individuals with autism requires a multidisciplinary approach, with specialists from various fields working together with the school. It is important to emphasize that learning goes beyond the school environment, since the same processes involved in learning in the classroom are present in everyday life. The role of the religious education teacher is to prepare students for life, not just for one-off assessments, thus making it a reflective curricular component for the student's entire life. This becomes even more evident when it comes to students with disabilities, especially autistic students, as they need a learning approach that is also integrated with social life.

Therefore, this study has highlighted that the educational intervention of religious teaching in the context of the social support network for autism is not only restricted to the treatment of students with specific difficulties, but also affects the teaching and learning process as a whole. Psychopedagogical diagnosis involves the school, the teacher, the student, the family and religious teaching, since the dynamics of education are the result of complex interactions between these different groups.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this publication.

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