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***PERSONAS DESAPARECIDAS Y FAMILIA:
BUSCANDO SU ESPACIO***

***MISSING PERSONS AND FAMILY:
LOOKING FOR THEIR SPACE***

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RESUMEN

En este trabajo se expone las características principales de la epilepsia. Se abordan de una forma sintética y accesible, desde su máxima expresión a partir de las crisis y su tipología, hasta el diagnóstico, epidemiología, pronóstico, calidad de vida, etiología, etc. En cierta forma, el artículo pretende aclarar conceptos relativos a esta enfermedad

Palabras clave: Crisis epiléptica; Frecuencia; Orígenes; Diagnóstico; Tratamiento; Pronostico.

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to explain epilepsy and its main features. Thus, it described in a synthetic form and language accessible: the crisis and its typology, to diagnosis, epidemiology, prognosis, quality of life, etiology, etc. In a way, the article aims to clarify concepts related to this disease.

Key Words: Epileptic seizure; Frequency; origins; Diagnosis; Treatment; Forecast.

Presentation

Paola Ferrara Tormo, graduated in Psychology and relative of a person that was missing for one year and half until he was tragically found in extreme conditions a few months ago. Since October 2016, member of the management committee of Inter-SOS, *Relative's Association of Missing People without Apparent Causes*.

To take into account

The disappearance of someone is a complex situation and all the areas that surround the missing person should take into account. Those areas are his closest environment, the context, the culture and the society surrounding him, institutions associated with the case, the media, and in general, all related professionals with the subject. The situation is the most complex for the people closest to the missing person, because they find themselves in an unexpected situation without time and space to assimilate the events and to face the contradictory feelings, which are a consequence of the situation.

To approach the treatment of families who find themselves in these situations it is important to analyze rigorously that complexity, which is increased by the fact that it is not easy to generalize, as each case is different. This shows that it is important to analyze each individual case, collecting all the necessary information to treat it sensitively and appropriately. Always prioritizing **respect, intimacy, dignity, comprehension, empathy and compassion towards the families**.

The following variables can change the way the families that are going through a case of disappearance, react. These are important to make a psychosocial analysis of the situation:

- **Age** of the missing person and age of his/her relatives.
- **The family relationship** with the missing person. **The family figure** that the person was/is.
- **Type of disappearance**.
- **Place** of disappearance and the **accessibility** to it.
- **Date, moment and duration** of the disappearance.
- **Mediatic and social repercussions** of the case.
- **Implication** of the authorities.
- **Active research** of the case, if there has been research and if there still is.
- **Personality and emotional intelligence** of the persons related to the case, both the missing person and the relatives.
- **Family resources** that can promote the investigation, the research and can help cope with the situation (economically, official contacts, social relationships, etc.).

Psychosocial reality

Intrinsic consequences

In the case of a missing person, we take into account the unique and individual characteristics of each case, but there are common feelings that the situation generates in the people that are going through this difficult period. These

feelings move constantly between **anguish and hope** and it is important to outline these concepts and have them always present.

SUSPENSE: "I don't know what happened, when, how and where it happened, if the person is fine or not, or how much longer this situation is going to last. I don't know what I have to accept if nobody gives me an answer to assimilate". The suspense causes the ambiguity of the loss, detailed later.

PAIN, NOSTALGIA: although it is not known if the person is alive or dead, the present reality is that this person is not here physically, and this fact creates a sense of absence, with the consequent emotional pain, inexplicable and incomparable to the physical pain.

IMPOTENCE / FRUSTATION / ANNOYANCE / ANGER: "We feel that they didn't look enough, they didn't listen to us, and we feel that nobody understands us. Nobody pays us enough attention. Maybe this loss could have been avoided". This is the moment where the affected people are looking for a culprit, logically or illogically.

AMBIGUITY: it is a consequence of the uncertainty. The missing person keeps on being present psychologically and absent physically. It creates ambiguity, contradiction, confusion in what to feel, what to do or think, how to refer to the person, how to explain the situation to others.

EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY / "FEELINGS ON ROLLER COASTER": On the one hand, there are days on which you find new clues to the missing person whereabouts and you can feel euphoric. On the other hand, some days you feel sadness because of the absence; other days anger and powerlessness. The people affected more closely have very varied, contradictory and unpredictable feelings.

REALITY – FICTION STATE: Literally, there are days that you do not know what is real and what is not. Some days you feel as if you are inside a movie, in a bad dream; other days you have another perspective... And this keeps on going successively. During and after the disappearance, memories adopt an unknown form.

LACK OF CONCENTRATION / OBSESSIVE IDEAS: There are many questions without answers, hypotheses and thoughts related to the last time that the missing person was seen, his words, his gestures, etc. These ideas can be recurrent.

FAULT / REGRET: "we are bad parents, bad sons and daughters, bad brothers and sisters; it could have been avoided, I have not been able to make the most of my time with that person, "what is...?".

HOPE: "If I don't see it, I do not believe it". You never lose it completely until there is a clear and palpable certainty. Hope can increase or decrease depending on the most probable hypothesis and the space in time that the person has been missing, but never disappear at all. As your hope decreases, the anxiety increases.

Those feelings can become durable in time, with the constant inability to begin the mourning process. The **lack of rituals** known to assimilate the loss and make progress in the process can difficult the situation during weeks, months, years, and even decades.

Interactive consequences

- Social isolation and loneliness.
- Little information and resources where to look and ask for help. Lack of a physical place where to apply.
- Lack of social consciousness – social problem not recognized.
- Lack of mental health professionals specialized in the topic.
- Legal, juridical and institutional gaps, economic factors ignored.

We find that with the intrinsic complexities implied in facing this type of loss that has no name and creates such contradictory feelings, you must add the social isolation and the absence of recognition of this serious problem, which can affect unforeseeably any person. The common feelings that arise when someone is suffering an ambiguous loss can be accentuate by the absence of recognition, and include feelings like neglect, loneliness or lack of understanding. These types of feelings are natural in families during the first months and years, but can persist also when the families feel alone, without knowing where to ask for help, and when they feel that the serious situation that they are suffering is not recognized by the society or the State from where they are citizens. The feelings and changes in the life of the families due to the disappearance can become paralyzing and neverending.

Confrontation

What to do to advance the social consequences

(So appease the psychological ones): directed to professionals and society.

- Social and professional responsibility: to create awareness in society so it is recognized as a social problem, so as to progress in all the related areas.
- Motivate volunteer work in mental health and social work areas. It is important to bear in mind that volunteer activities are an added help. However, the responsibility that the State should bear regarding this social problem is still of vital importance. It is a problem that cannot depend only on the good will of people, but on organizational and official recognition.
- Give a name to the psychological consequences. Pauline Boss created the concept of *Ambiguous Loss Grief* to give meaning to the psychological consequences that happen in various ambiguous traumatic situations. In the case of disappearances, during the ambiguous grief, **the missing person is physically absent, but present psychologically**. There are actions and events that can be considered transitional rituals, which can help to calm the

emotional stress and balance the grieving process for ambiguous loss.

- To clarify certain concepts for the treatment of the disappearances and to internalize them: **respect, intimacy, dignity, comprehension, empathy, compassion**. The people, who suffer the disappearance of someone loved, should not be considered as just collateral victims of the traumatic situation, but also **survivors**.
- Practice active listening. To understand and communicate to the families that the feelings that they are feeling are completely normal in their situation, independently of how long the disappearance lasts. It is important keep them informed regularly.
- Strive to introduce psychological and social support figures in the relevant official institutions (social services, victims' centers, etc.). Create support groups and motivate the participation of survivors.

What not to do?

Minimize their feelings and their situation. Even maximize and create false expectations.

- Generalize, make assumptions, compare a case with others, or with other problems.
- To judge, to force, to stigmatize, to speculate, to insist.
- To not use sensitive language that could emphasize the pain.

In first person

After I experienced the situation of having a missing brother, living through grief for ambiguous loss, and feeling in the present the grief for his death; I can admit and confirm that hope is the last thing that you lose. That does not mean that it is possible to try to accept the suspense situation, working with the Psychological tools aimed at appeasing the desperate pain, the unstable roller coaster of feelings and the emotional stress. The disappearance of a loved one that is finally found without life dramatically affects the life of someone: you are already not the person that you were before the disappearance nor even the same person who you were during the disappearance. The ambiguity diminishes but it continues. It is important to give support to the families from the beginning to end and to understand that when the disappearance is solved, the situation for the family has not yet solved. There are several things which are still unsettled, such as, between others, taking preventive measures, procedures of lawsuits, clarifying the facts, burial of the mortal remains or receiving condolences. The two last ones are considered rituals of grief for death, to help mark the closure of a stage and the beginning of the process. It will be with that closure, that there will be the most possibility to assimilate and accept the present situation. In addition, I would like to underline the grievance of the feeling of physical impotence in disappearances abroad, with the fact that the place is not palpable and the difficulty to access it is greater.

Recommended readings:

Acinas, Patricia (2012). **Duelo en situaciones especiales: suicidio, desaparecidos, muerte traumática.** Revista Digital de Medicina Psicosomática y Psicoterapia

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