

Causes And Motivations of Adolescent Runaway from The Family Home: The Problematic Nature of The Family System in Two Clinical Cases as A Model

أسباب ودوافع هروب المراهق من البيت العائلي: إشكالية النسق العائلي لحالتين اكلينيكييتين - نموذجاً

Causes Et Motivations De La Fugue Des Adolescents Du Domicile Familial : La Nature Problématique Du Système Familial Dans Deux Cas Cliniques Comme Modèle

Yamina, OUBADJI ^{*1}

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ملخص:

يُعدّ الهروب من المنزل سلوكاً عالي الخطورة يلجأ إليه بعض المراهقين في حالات الضيق النفسي، وغالباً ما يحدث دون علم الوالدين، ويتسم بالاندفاع وغياب الهدف الواضح. وينتج عادةً عن حدث ضاغط، مما يعرض المراهقين لمخاطر جسدية ونفسية خطيرة مثل العنف والاستغلال والإساءة في بيئة الشارع. ويرتبط هذا السلوك بمشكلات أسرية متعددة، كالصراعات المتكررة، والإحباطات المستمرة، وضعف التواصل بين المراهقين ووالديهم. كما تُعدّ المراهقة مرحلة حرجية تتسم بأزمات الهوية، والرغبة في الاستقلال، والصراعات الداخلية، مما يزيد من الهشاشة النفسية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد أبرز الأسباب الأسرية والعلائقية التي تدفع المراهقين إلى الهروب من المنزل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهروب، النسق العائلي؛ المراهق؛ سلوك المخاطرة؛ الأسباب والدوافع.

Abstract :

Running away from home is a high-risk behavior adopted by some adolescents during periods of psychological distress. It usually occurs without parental knowledge and is characterized by impulsivity, suddenness, and the absence of a clear goal or destination. Often triggered by a stressful event, running away exposes adolescents to serious physical and psychological dangers, including violence, exploitation, and abuse in the street environment. This behavior is commonly associated with family-related difficulties such as persistent conflicts, ongoing frustrations, and ineffective communication between adolescents and their parents. Additionally, adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by identity crises, a strong desire for autonomy, and intense internal conflicts, which increase emotional vulnerability. This study aims to identify the main family and relational factors that motivate adolescents to run away from home.

Keywords : Running Away; Family System; Adolescent; Risk Behavior; Causes and Motives.

Résumé :

La fugue est un comportement à haut risque adopté par certains adolescents en détresse psychologique. Elle se produit généralement sans l'accord des parents et se caractérise par l'impulsivité, la soudaineté et l'absence d'objectif précis. Déclenchée par un événement stressant, elle expose les adolescents à de graves dangers physiques et psychologiques, tels que la violence, l'exploitation et la maltraitance dans l'environnement de la rue. Ce comportement est souvent lié à des difficultés familiales, notamment les conflits répétés, les frustrations persistantes et une communication déficiente entre parents et adolescents. De plus, l'adolescence est une période critique marquée par des crises identitaires, un besoin d'autonomie et des conflits internes, augmentant la vulnérabilité émotionnelle. Cette étude vise à identifier les principales causes familiales et relationnelles qui poussent les adolescents à fuguer.

Mots clés : La fuite ; le système familial ; l'adolescent ; le comportement à risque ; les causes et les motivations.

¹* Yamina Oubadji.

Affiliation institution, abbreviation laboratory name: Country, yamina.oubadji@univ-constantine2.dz.

Introduction :

Psychologists have classified the phenomenon of running away from the family home among behavioral disorders in children and adolescents. Running away is not categorized as a delinquent act, a minor offense, or a legal crime, despite the possibility of security services intervening through legal procedures in particular cases. It should not be regarded as a transient incident; rather, it constitutes a reaction, a plea for protection, or a demand for autonomy arising from psychological distress or from a stressful and threatening situation experienced by the adolescent. Running away is a mode through which the adolescent expresses his or her suffering and psychological pain (Gosselin, 2008, p. 96).

From a psychopathological perspective, running away is considered an impulsive act and a motor discharge in response to intense psychological pressure that is difficult to control. Studies have demonstrated a high prevalence of this behavior particularly among adolescents, owing to the sensitive developmental stage they undergo. Some scholars have described adolescence as a “crisis stage,” in view of the rapid physiological changes that affect the adolescent’s body and psyche. This period is characterized by emotional instability and by the adolescent’s persistent search for identity and independence through self-assertion and affirmation, manifested in rebellion, stubbornness, and opposition to values, rules, and instructions, whether within the home or outside it (school, the street, etc.). Running away is among the risk behaviors to which the adolescent may resort, involving voluntary departure from the home without parental knowledge, as a result of the ongoing conflict between the adolescent and the family, which is experienced as profound frustration and psychological suffering and translated into hostile behaviors directed either toward others or toward the self (self-destructive acts). This risk behavior thus constitutes a symbolic expressive means of communicating suffering and rejecting parental authority subsumed under what is termed “education”; however, the adolescent perceives this authoritarian educational style as an obstacle to his or her desires and aspirations, a perception that leads to acting out (running away) without consideration of the grave consequences that affect both physical and mental health.

From the systemic perspective, the adolescent is regarded as part of a larger system and as an active element within that system, one who both influences and is influenced by interactions and relationships. This necessitates change in the systemic organization in response to the adolescent’s aggressive, rebellious, or oppositional behaviors, which generate dysfunction within the system and require its reorganization and the restructuring of roles, rules, and authority in a manner commensurate with the individual’s transition from childhood to adulthood.

From this standpoint, the aim of the present study is an attempt to uncover the motives and causes related to the family system that lead the adolescent to resort to risk-taking behavior.

Accordingly, the central problem of this study revolves around the adolescent crisis and its complexities and the impact it exerts on the adolescent’s cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and affective dimensions, particularly the stage of puberty, which constitutes both an entry into adolescence and a transitional passage separating childhood from adulthood. It represents a second birth, during which separation from the family occurs gradually and the childhood phase is relinquished through the disappearance of the “child” within the adolescent; this in itself constitutes a transformation (Dolto, 1989).

The adolescent is no longer a child and has not yet become an adult; rather, he or she lives a transitional phase characterized by what (Braconnier & Marcelli, 2013) termed the “double movement”: the first is the negation and denial of childhood, and the second is the search for a position within adulthood. This process constitutes the core of the crisis experienced by the adolescent, as internal equilibrium is disrupted and this lived experience is expressed through feelings of strangeness and loss of identity. Many specialists consider adolescence a fundamental stage of maturation; it is not merely a simple developmental phase in the evolution of personality, but rather a revolution, as described by Witzer, who explained that it unfolds on three levels.

At the bodily–biological level, it is manifested in morphological and physiological changes, such as the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics and the sudden appearance of sexuality, which lead the adolescent to feelings of guilt and troubling questions concerning the body. At the psychological level, there is a reactivation of the excitatory and irregular reactions associated with childhood conflicts, in which the adolescent finds himself or herself caught in affective ambivalence, between the search for autonomy on the one hand and nostalgia for the security of childhood on the other. At the socio-cultural level, the desire to assert an idealized self leads the adolescent to opposition and to conflict with parental authority and with familial and social values, while simultaneously seeking new models and identifications outside the family. These dynamics also vary according to the cultural contexts of societies.

In addition to all these complexities inherent in adolescence, there are other psychological problems (such as emotional deprivation, neglect, abandonment, and violence in all its forms) and social problems (such as family disintegration, divorce, and material deprivation), which result primarily from dysfunction within the family system. This profoundly affects the adolescent’s psyche, rendering responses markedly violent. This is what we sought to elucidate in the present study through our principal question of whether disturbances in the family system constitute important motives and causes that lead the adolescent to engage in risk-taking behavior, specifically manifested in running away from the family home.

On this basis, it is necessary to address the principal concepts of this study, including the concept of running away from the family home, its types, the motives leading to it, and its consequences for the adolescent’s physical and psychological well-being, as well as the concept of the family system, followed by the presentation of two clinical cases as models of this behavior.

1- The Concept of Running Away from the Family Home

Conceptualizations have varied according to approaches and studies. (Hamel & Others, 2006) focuses on the running away of minors, defining it as the voluntary act by which a minor leaves the family home without parental authorization. Running away is defined as “a risk behavior whereby an adolescent leaves the family home for at least 24 hours without parental consent” (Arnold et al, 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines running away as “the abandonment of one’s usual place of residence, without consideration of the destination and without a clear objective. It is most often the result of family conflict. This act takes on a symbolic meaning of expression and is temporally delimited.” The organization further indicates, on the basis of international statistics, that there are approximately 125 acts of running away by minors daily, with a mean age of 17 years, although it may be identified as a disorder at the age of 6–7 years.

According to Hanigan, running away is characterized by three elements: the voluntary act of leaving, the absence of parental authorization, and a duration of at least one full night (Hanigan, 1997, p. 18).

Thus, running away is not considered a delinquent act; rather, it is a symptom indicative of psychological suffering, most often rooted in a lack of dialogue and mutual understanding within the family environment and in the use of blackmail and bargaining strategies by adults. This situation drives the adolescent to run away, both as a means of escaping this suffering and as a way of exerting psychological pressure on the family, in the hope of bringing about positive change.

2- Forms of Running Away

There are multiple forms of running away, which may assume either a reactive and spontaneous form (flight response) on the one hand, or a planned form (flight orientation) on the other.

- **Anomic running away:** This occurs when the adolescent is exposed to deviant or criminal social models and becomes involved in other behavioral problems, such as the desire to evade punishment. In addition, it includes vulnerability to certain risk behaviors (such as drug use, hallucinogenic pills, and involvement in prostitution networks, etc.).
- **Detachment running away:** This is manifested in the adolescent's feelings of rejection, abandonment, and inner emptiness; running away here serves as a way of testing the degree of attachment to adults.
- **Test running away:** This is associated with the reorganization of the family environment and is considered a reaction to parental separation.
- **Emancipatory running away:** This represents an attempt to free oneself from authority (conflict with parental authority, escape from miserable living conditions, and the desire to leave in order to discover other places and circumstances, to meet other people, and to undergo new experiences).
- **Automization running away:** This involves the desire to break with the stage of adolescence, the demand for freedom and independence, and the need for social status, as well as escape from a narrow and suffocating environment with the aim of progressing toward autonomy (Messerschmitt, 1987, pp. 66-67).

3- Risk Factors Specific to Runaway Adolescents

- **Individual risk factors:** These include low self-esteem in the adolescent, social isolation, feelings of distress, psychological pressure, and frustration in response to any failure or negative criticism, in addition to a sense of injustice (devaluation, lack of respect, mistreatment, and violence). They also encompass anxiety related to sexuality (masturbation, sexual abuse, etc.), wariness in dealing with unfamiliar individuals, fear of authority (particularly parental authority), a previous runaway experience that the adolescent perceived positively and seeks to repeat, the search for freedom, suffering from conduct disorders and early delinquency, as well as alcohol and drug use.

- **Familial risk factors:** Fragile economic and social conditions, family disintegration, familial rejection or abandonment, frequent conflicts among family members, and parental violence and neglect.
- **School-related factors:** Recurrent absenteeism, poor academic performance, academic failure, negative labeling by teachers (very poor grading, negative verbal descriptions, etc.), and numerous interpersonal conflicts and altercations (with teachers, administrative staff, and peers).
- **Peer-related risk factors:** Associating with peers who have runaway experiences and spending time with delinquent companions, which exposes the adolescent to deviant behavior.
- **Societal risk factors:** The absence of positive, effective social roles and models.

4- Contributing Motives Leading the Adolescent to the Act of Running Away

- **Rebellious behavior:** Manifested in opposition to adults in general (parents, educators, interveners, etc.) in order to test the limits of their authority.
- **The search for autonomy:** Expressed in testing one's abilities and competencies for independence and in proving self-reliance. Running away is regarded as a means of gaining deeper self-knowledge, revealing one's identity, and demonstrating personal capacities to both the family environment and the world outside it.
- **The desire for change:** Reflected in dissatisfaction with the situations and circumstances in which the adolescent lives, whether at home, at school, or elsewhere, as well as in confronting these distressing and difficult conditions and adopting a new lifestyle experience.
- **The search for solutions:** Involves managing conflict and resolving problems. In addition, it may include a troubling sexual situation through which the adolescent seeks to compel adults to reflect on the issue.
- **The belief in satisfaction and psychological comfort outside the family environment:** Manifested in attraction to a new living environment in comparison with the current one, and in the adolescent's perception and firm belief that what is better is always outside the family milieu (Courtois, 2011, p. 58).

5- Triggering events leading the adolescent to engage in running away

Affective states constitute a fundamental trigger for the transition to action, particularly intense emotions such as anxiety and stress, in the face of which the adolescent is unable to regulate or manage these affects. Consequently, running away becomes an expressive means and an instrument for extinguishing these emotions as a temporary solution. These triggering events manifest in the cognitive, behavioral, and situational domains. (Tyler, & Bersani, 2008,p28)

Cognitive triggering event: This consists in the adolescent's experience of guilt following the commission of a specific mistake and fear of its consequences, a sense of injustice inflicted

upon them and a perceived lack of parental understanding of their needs, and, accordingly, feelings of rejection and abandonment.

- Behavioral triggering event: This is reflected in disturbances in the relationship with one or both parents, or with one of the siblings or with peers; substance use; and the deprivation of the adolescent's opportunities to go out and to form friendships.
- Situational triggering event: This consists in a context of distressing and uncomfortable origin, rigid life rules, the absence of containing or supportive frameworks, harsh punishment, excessive repression, the use of violence in its various forms, and neglect; the absence of one parent (through travel, hospitalization due to chronic illness, death, divorce, etc.); and a change of residence.

6- Consequences of Running Away from the Family Home for the Adolescent

An adolescent's flight from the family home gives rise to numerous problems whose consequences are extremely severe and negatively affect thinking, behavior, and emotional responses. Studies have shown that living on the streets exposes adolescents to multiple risks and renders them vulnerable to various forms of abuse and to delinquency (Kim, Herren, & Huang, 2009).

What further heightens the level of risk is sexual exploitation of adolescents—especially runaway girls—which compounds the complexity of their situation, particularly in cases of early pregnancy and childbirth. Such circumstances necessitate intervention by security forces, judicial authorities, and social protection services, and the underage girl becomes subject to investigation and legal procedures and all that this entails. In addition to the risks of infectious and immunodeficiency diseases transmitted sexually, such as AIDS (HIV), there is also the development of certain mental and psychological disorders (Boivin, Roy, Haley, & Others, 2005, p. 96), as well as alcohol and drug use. These factors lead to deviant behaviors and to criminal activities, especially when the adolescent becomes involved in criminal groups that compel him or her to meet their demands in exchange for food or some money (Chen et al., 2007).

Moreover, the adolescent separates from school at an early stage. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the educational level of runaways does not exceed the middle-school level, as school failure and dropout are among the principal risk factors. Added to this are sociocultural consequences, manifested in stigma or social labeling—namely, intense social rejection of the runaway, as this is regarded as a mark of shame and disgrace, particularly when it concerns a runaway girl, who is distinguished from others by the enduring stigma of running away and illegitimate pregnancy. This renders her the object of social exclusion at all levels and of general rejection from participation in social life, leading adolescents overall to lose self-confidence, to experience a devaluation of their worth, and to suffer from diminished self-esteem. Motives underlying the act of running away.

7- The Concept of the Family System

Halley, J. defines it as one of the biological systems characterized by complexity in its elements. The family system is a system that functions as an integrated unit comprising a group of

individuals bound by relationships, interactions, and reciprocal influences. According to Watzlawick, the family constitutes a system in constant interaction, both internally and externally, which illustrates the complexity of its dynamics and the openness of this system to continuous interaction with the social environment, school, work, and society as a whole. Jackson further explained that interaction within the family operates according to rules and laws, whereby the family establishes boundaries of rights and duties for each individual, formulated in the form of guidelines and directives to ensure the continuity of interaction among members of the same family.

Accordingly, and in line with systems theory, the family is considered a single entity in which familial bonds are so closely interconnected that any change in the behavior of one member affects the behavior of the other members through feedback processes. Family development entails an alternation between phases of equilibrium and phases of disequilibrium, as well as the system's capacity for transformation and change through the use of mechanisms and strategies to achieve adaptation, particularly with regard to the functioning and structure of the family.

8- Study Methodology

In this study, we employed the clinical approach and conducted semi-structured clinical interviews with two adolescents, one male and one female, aged 15–17 years. We also administered the Family Apperception Test (FAT), a projective instrument developed by several researchers, including Wayne, Sulher, Henry, and Sotile. This test draws its theoretical foundations from systems theory. It consists of 21 black-and-white plates depicting everyday family situations, relationships, and activities that elicit projective manifestations of family processes and the emotional reactions embedded in interactions among members of the system. The test was adapted to the Algerian context by the researcher (Mzab, 2015, p. 30).

9- Presentation of the Two Case Studies

- **Case S:** Case S is a 15-year-old male in the fourth year of middle school. He lives with his parents, an older sister two years his senior, and a younger brother four years his junior. His mother is a homemaker with a university education, and his father works as a state executive in a national company. His social and economic circumstances are excellent.
- **The Act of Running Away:** S ran away from home after obtaining a very low average in the second term (6.00). Fear of his father's punishment led him to leave the house immediately after receiving a threatening phone call from him. He asked a friend for some money and traveled by bus to another province. Upon arriving around midday, he realized that the money he had was sufficient for only one day. He therefore remained at the bus station, purchasing only food. When it was 11 p.m., he went to the information desk and asked about a bus returning to his province, but he did not have the fare; at that point, he was overcome by intense fear and anxiety. He confided in one of the station employees, who persuaded him to inform the authorities. His father was contacted by the police around 1 a.m. The father and S's maternal uncle arrived in the neighboring province at approximately 3 a.m.
- **Motivations for the running away of case S:** S is characterized by a calm temperament and speaks very little; signs of sadness, fear, and anxiety are evident in his demeanor. His mother reports that he is extremely afraid of his father and remains socially withdrawn, not

leaving the house by order of his father. He cries frequently, but in secrecy, until the mother learned that her son was a victim of peer bullying due to his not going out, as they label him with hurtful epithets such as “al-mahjūba,” a term used for a woman who does not leave the house, or “‘Atīqa,” a female name. This is compounded by the father’s violence, daily criticisms, and excessive irritability toward everyone. The father believes that he has provided all of his children’s material needs and does not acknowledge that his parenting style is harsh; rather, he blames his son for having everything—by which he means the material dimension—and for having no justification for his lack of interest in his studies.

- Presentation of case M: Case M is a female, 17 years old, who discontinued her schooling after repeated failures; specifically, she dropped out after being expelled from her institution in the fourth year of middle school due to her recurrent academic failure. She lives in a low-income family. The father is ill with a chronic disease and is frequently absent because of working far from home. She has four brothers and is the only girl among them (two older and two younger). The mother practices the profession of sewing.
- The act of running away: She left the home, fleeing to a young man with whom she had been communicating through social media. Fortunately, the young man felt alarmed and fearful when she sought refuge with him and persuaded her to return home after only two days of absence.
- Motivations for the running away of case M: According to her mother, she is frequently in conflict with her four brothers, especially the older ones; due to the father’s recurrent absence, they exercise considerable authority over her, as she puts it, and she constantly wishes she had a sister with whom she could become close. According to the girl, her relationship with her mother is superficial; the mother is a seamstress with many clients and does not have sufficient time for her daughter—according to the daughter’s account. The mother states that her daughter lost her close friend who committed suicide, and that M used to repeatedly express a desire to commit suicide like her friend when her brothers put excessive pressure on her and describe her as “stupid.” The mother added that her daughter does not see herself as beautiful and that her body is extremely slender to the point that she appears like a small child, which has led her to hate her own body.

9-1. Analysis of the Situations of the Two Cases

- **Course of the runaway:** In both cases, the act of running away was impulsive, and both adolescents were in a state of crisis. In the case of S, the individual was experiencing intense fear, whereas M was in a state of psychological distress and anxiety.
- **During the runaway:** Case S was in a very difficult situation, involving a long journey without sufficient money, accompanied by feelings of fear and anxiety. Case M, by contrast, found herself with a young man she knew only superficially; fortunately, he refused to shelter her for more than two days and compelled her to return home.
- **Degree of risk:** In both cases, the level of risk was highly likely to be very high. In the case of S, traveling far outside his region without money increased the likelihood of sexual

assault and of being drawn into unsafe environments, especially as he remained at the station until late at night. In the case of M, the situation was even more dangerous, first because she is female and had gone of her own volition to a young man, who could have sexually assaulted her and subsequently exploited her in other forms of deviant activity.

- **Motivation for running away:** In both cases, the motivation for running away was a pathogenic family environment. Both adolescents suffer psychologically; both experience neglect, a complete absence of dialogue, and an atmosphere marked by violence in both environments (the father abuses his son, and the brothers abuse their sister). Both cases are characterized by dependence and lack of autonomy, as well as feelings of devaluation resulting from destructive criticism.

9-2. Quantitative Analysis of the Family Perception Test for the First Case

Table -1-: Presents the results of the Family Perception Test for case S

Number of Recorded Points	Subcategory	Category
15	Family conflict	Manifest conflict
10	Marital conflict	
2	Another type of conflict	
0	Absence of conflict	
8	Negative resolution	Conflict resolution
8	Absence of resolution	
2	Appropriate – participatory	Boundary regulation (definition of rules)
3	Appropriate – non-participatory	
8	Inappropriate – non-participatory	
10	Mother as ally	Relationship patterns
0	Father as ally	
1	Another ally	
2	Mother as a pressure agent	
10	Father as a pressure agent	
0	Sister–brother as a pressure agent	
2	One of the spouses as a pressure agent	
1	Another pressure agent	
11	Enmeshment	Boundary definition
0	Disengagement	
15	Harsh treatment	Abuse / maltreatment
2	Neglect and abandonment	Emotional tone
7	Sadness–depression	
5	Anger–hostility	
15	Fear–anxiety	
0	Happiness–satisfaction	
0	Another type of emotion	
129		Overall dysfunction index

9-3. Qualitative Analysis of the Test for the First Case

The scoring sheet of the test highlights the points obtained by Case S, who followed all the instructions and provided narrative content for each card and the twenty-one images, with the protocol appearing clearly, thereby allowing for scoring. The overall index of dysfunction in family system functioning is very high, with a total score of 129 points, while the total manifest conflict reached 27 points. The domain of conflict was concentrated primarily in family conflict (15 points) and marital conflict (10 points). As for the family's functional pattern, it was equally divided between negative resolution and absence of resolution, with 8 points each. In addition, the presence of inappropriate patterns for defining rules in conflict resolution was observed, with the highest score assigned to the "inappropriate-non-participatory" category (8 points). This suggests, based on the case narratives, the existence of a family dynamic that leads Case S to reject the rules imposed by his father, indicating immature parental functioning. This interpretation is further supported by the presence of a high level of fusion responses, estimated at 11 points. Regarding the quality of manifested relationships, the coding network of the protocol indicates the presence of an allied mother relationship, with a total score of 10 points, matched equally by a pressuring father. This has led Case S to respond negatively to family rules characterized by an emotional climate dominated by fear and anxiety (15 points), as well as sadness and depression (7 points). This is considered an indicator of relational disturbance affecting all members of the system, with the source of pressure most often attributed to the father and his harsh style of interaction (15 points), together with a complete absence of dialogue. This situation has resulted in the development of behavioral disturbance in Case S and his maladjustment within the family system due to disrupted parental relationships, which are of great importance both for the socialization of the child and adolescent and for the development of a well-adjusted personality.

9-4. Quantitative Analysis of the Family Perception Test for the Second Case

Table -2-: Presents the results of the Family Perception Test for Case M

Number of Recorded Points	Subcategories	Categories
15	Family conflict	Manifest conflict
10	Marital conflict	
2	Another type of conflict	
0	Absence of conflict	
8	Negative resolution	Conflict resolution
8	Absence of resolution	
2	Appropriate – participatory	Boundary regulation (rule definition)
3	Appropriate – non-participatory	
8	Inappropriate – non-participatory	
10	Mother as ally	Quality of relationships
0	Father as ally	
1	Other ally	

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2	Mother as stressor	
10	Father as stressor	
0	Sister–brother as stressor	
2	One spouse as stressor	
1	Other as stressor	
11	Enmeshment	Boundary definition
0	Disengagement	
15	Harsh treatment	Mistreatment
2	Neglect and abandonment	
7	Sadness – depression	Emotional tone
5	Anger – hostility	
15	Fear – anxiety	
0	Happiness – satisfaction	
0	Other type of emotions	
129		Overall index of dysfunction

9-5. Qualitative Analysis of the Test for the Second Case

The scoring sheet of the test highlights the points obtained by Case M, who followed all the instructions and provided narrative content for each card and the 21 images; the protocol is thus clearly presented, allowing for scoring. The overall index of dysfunction in the functioning of the family system is very high, with a total of 115 points, while the total of manifest conflict reached 22 points. The conflict domain was concentrated mainly in family conflict, estimated at 11 points, and another type of conflict at 9 points. Due to the father’s absence and work at a distance, authority shifted to the brothers, who displayed a form of harshness and violence toward Case M and subjected her to all forms of abuse, which ultimately led her to flee.

As for the family’s functional pattern, it was confined to negative resolution, estimated at 6 points, in contrast to the absence of resolution, estimated at 3 points. This indicates the immaturity of the members of the system in their relationships with one another due to the lack of dialogue, in addition to the presence of inappropriate patterns in defining rules for conflict resolution, with 4 points for “inappropriate–non-participatory.” This suggests, through the case narratives, the existence of a family dynamic that drives Case S to reject the rules imposed by her brothers, who constituted the greatest source of pressure for her, with a total of 17 points, compared with 10 points for the mother as a source of pressure. This is evidence of the magnitude of the pressures experienced by Case M, to the extent that she attempted to separate from this pathogenic system; the separation boundaries were estimated at 6 points. This further supports the presence of maltreatment and harsh treatment, estimated at 9 points, in contrast to neglect and abandonment, estimated at 8 points—particularly her mother’s abandonment and neglect of her.

As a result, the prevailing emotional climate within this system was one of sadness and depression, estimated at 8 points, which reinforced in the case suicidal ideation and a desire for death. In addition, anger and hostility also prevailed, rendering this system characterized by negative dynamics in conflict resolution and interpersonal dealings, and constituting an indicator of dysfunction and disturbance affecting all members of the system.

10- Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the Two Cases from a Systemic Perspective

From the presentation of the two cases and the results of the Family Perception Test, we conclude that the family systemic approach and its dynamics make it possible to understand the functioning of the family. When this functioning is disrupted, the family system enters a state of crisis. The flight of a family member places all members at the center of this crisis. In contemporary approaches, runaway behavior is linked to dysfunctional family situations that generate pain and suffering for the adolescent who flees. Such behavior is also explained in terms of disturbances in the parental relationship and the quality of attachment since early childhood, because secure attachment—as described by Bowlby—constitutes the foundation of the emotional relationship with the mother in particular, or with the caregiving substitute, and persists across all life stages. The quality of attachment influences personality development and responses to various social relationships; the attachment system thus represents either a protective factor or a risk factor for many psychological disorders. According to (Minuchin, 1979), the clarity of boundaries within the family system constitutes an evaluative criterion of family dynamics: a family's closure upon itself is an indicator of distancing among its members. We also observe rigid family boundaries and strict, unclear communication devoid of shared meaning among members, which results in impaired adaptation, lack of commitment, and weak alliances among family members. This, in turn, gives rise to multiple problems and psychological disorders.

Each family has its own system and rules imposed on its members; however, these must be both stable and flexible in order to allow for adaptive and fluid interaction, particularly with adolescents. Inflexible styles, inappropriate responses to different situations, and repetitive, stereotyped reactions translate into pathological symptoms that become clearly visible in adolescents' behavior. This is precisely what we observed in the two study cases: dialogue is the foundation of coexistence within the system, in contrast to what we noted in both cases—an entirely absent dialogue, an emotionally absent and uninterested mother, and a busy and unavailable father. This led to a reversal of roles and the transfer of parental authority to siblings in the case of M., which drove her to seek a source of affection and attention outside the family. In the case of S., the father's strict—indeed violent and harsh—educational style, combined with the mother's emotional coldness, led him to “punish” them by leaving in order to attract their attention, even if in a negative manner, by eliciting their worry and prompting them to search for him, thereby obtaining their attention for a few hours. As (Fredette & Plante, 2004, p. 26) explain, an adolescent's flight from home constitutes a disturbing event that provokes intense emotional reactions in parents—anger, sadness, fear, anxiety, and helplessness—whereas for the adolescent it represents a temporary solution and a message to parents aimed at change for the better. The parenting style characterized by the exercise of authority through coercion rather than guidance, counsel, and care for the adolescent, as well as the absence of flexibility in authority, reduces the hierarchical distance between father and son. This contributes to the emergence of behavioral problems in the adolescent, depriving him of opportunities for emotional development and autonomous independence, thereby confirming the ineffectiveness of the parental subsystem, particularly in the first case. Watzlawick and his colleagues have also shown that dysfunction within a system is often located either in the relationship—within the interactional context rather than the content—or in a confusion that appears at both levels: content as communication and relationship as metacommunication. A

contradiction may also emerge between these two levels, referred to as paradoxical communication. Bateson identified another form of pathological communication, the “double bind,” in which speech does not align with meaning and entails an incongruity between positions and affect, characterized by strangeness, contradiction, and illogicality—features indicative of the depth of psychological disturbance resulting from disordered family interaction. This is what we observed in the second case in the emotional distance between the adolescent and her mother; in addition, the rigid boundaries and limited communication between them confirm that the family system is unhealthy. Minuchin explained this by stating that “family dysfunctions are related to how different patterns of boundaries are distributed—whether they are respected or ignored, rigid or permeable—within the family system.” The second case therefore turned to the outside world in search of the affection and acceptance that she lacked within her family.

Conclusion:

An adolescent’s flight from the family home may be no more than a stage for the crystallization of aspirations and hopes and for the pursuit of desires. The solution the adolescent believes he has found in severing all ties with his past and environment—owing to dissatisfaction, psychological discomfort, and the belief that escape will rid him of pain and suffering—proves to be only a temporary one, a fact the runaway later comes to realize. He finds himself in the same suffering, intensified, as though his shadow has followed him. If this indicates anything, it points to immaturity, impulsiveness, and cognitive confusion—traits of an emotionally reactive and underdeveloped personality, which are characteristic of adolescence, a stage that constitutes a crisis in itself. Although the results of this study reveal, above all, the presence of a pathogenic family system in which all systemic functions—dialogue, communication, and interaction—are disrupted, thereby influencing the behaviors of its members, this effect is particularly evident in the adolescent, who often exhibits maladaptive reactions and responses.

Accordingly, running away as a behavioral disorder can be said to emerge from the convergence of several factors, most importantly psychological, familial, social, biological, and cultural factors, since the constitution of the human being and the determinants of personality derive from all of these.

Thus, from this study we may distill a number of recommendations that we consider important to highlight for their role in building a sound family system, foremost among them:

- Training parents in child-rearing.
- Training parents and educators more generally in the skills of dialogue and communication.
- Sensitizing parents to the importance of secure attachment in the early years of the child’s life.
- Guiding parents on how to deal with the adolescent.
- Raising parental awareness of the characteristics and complexities of adolescence.
- Encouraging parents to consult specialists in psychology whenever necessary.
- Training parents in flexible educational approaches to crisis resolution

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