

Disruptions from a Traumatic Event: A Clinical Vignette

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The paper presents a clinical vignette regarding the psychological assessment of a seven years old boy, following a traumatic event, an accident with a bus that resulted in his grandfather's death. We wish to illustrate how the administration of projective techniques, like the Rorschach, can reveal several manifestations of the impact that the traumatic event had on the child.

The child comes for the assessment following a traumatic event in which he was involved, an accident that resulted in his grandfather's death. His grandfather was hit by a bus when they were both crossing a street. The child suffered only a few injuries in one hand. The grandfather's death was not immediate. He spent several months in state of coma. The child has seven years old, and has a brother of four. His parents seek compensation in the court for personal damages. In an interview with the mother, she described her child several fears, of dogs, of leaving home alone or of fire, for example, and also described the child's aggressive behavior toward his young brother.

With this vignette we wish to illustrate that it is possible to find in the psychological assessment process, especially when using projective techniques like the Rorschach, evident manifestations that have resulted, in a certain way, from the impact of a traumatic event on a child. It should be noted however, that we do not wish to neglect the pre-morbid internal conflict and family dysfunction that may be presented in the individual history, which of course 'interact' with the traumatic event in the onset of the current psychological distress. Empirical research has shown that, generally speaking, the characteristics of the traumatic response depend much on prior factors, of which we highlight the quality of the attachment (Kobak, et.al. 2001).

Savage (2003) administered SIS and Hypnotic relaxation in a case of a Child after the traumatic experience of his parents. divorce This case history illustrated the effectiveness of inkblot images as a psychodiagnostic tool and also as an aid to psychotherapy. The therapist was able to help the patient to resolve his unconscious conflict. Cassell and Dubey (2003) have also demonstrated the power of inkblot images in several cases..

In the present psychological assessment it is possible to admit that the traumatic event experienced previously by the child, namely the grandfather's death and the accident with the bus in which they were involved, in interaction with other factors related to prior family relationships and experiences, have contributed to the current psychological difficulties, particularly for the painful emotional experience of the child and manifest anxiety in the face of new or unexpected situations.

Let's see some parts of the psychological assessment process:

Once Upon a Time technique: (A thematic projective technique consisting of seven cards representing several everyday situations in children's life, Fagulha, 2008).

On Card II: (The card consists on a child who is sick and lying on the bed): He made the story as "After the doctor went away, he stayed crying and then he went to give a gift, and then his mother told him a story, and then the 'fast one' walked away". A card with an image of a "child, sick and lying on the bed, may had allowed the projection of his own sick condition after the accident". The story has helped him in processing the grief. Also, the "presence" of the maternal object allowed him to "calm down" his pain.

On Card III: (The card consists on a child going to the beach with the parents): the story was "Then he was asking friends if he could play and then they laughed of him and he went to lay down on his beach towel, and then a 'fast one' crossed the road and he did not died." Crossing the road without any injury ("he did not died") may be a projection of his positive ego strength and positive approach towards the hurdles in the future.

On Card IV: (The card consists on a child is waking from a nightmare): "After he had become frightened, 'oh mother, the ghost scared me', 'I did not know! I was very surprised', and then he took the rifle and

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