

APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS VULNERABILITY AND THE IMPACT AS ONE HEALTH INITIATIVE

(Abordagem à vulnerabilidade de desabrigados e o impacto como iniciativa de saúde única)

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RESUMO: Pessoas em situação de rua têm sido consideradas um problema mundial na área da política pública e que demanda uma intervenção multidisciplinar com abordagem de assistência social e saúde. Algumas dessas pessoas em situação de rua têm interação próxima e de companhia com animais domésticos. Embora animais de companhia possam oferecer estabilidade emocional, podem contribuir para recusa no acolhimento humano e persistência nas ruas, como animais de companhia podem ser proibidos de adentrar em abrigos humanos. A presença de animais e a superexposição ambiental podem agravar coinfeções nestas populações vulneráveis. Por isso a importância de incluir o médico veterinário na rede multidisciplinar para garantir a saúde animal e reduzir as zoonoses e seus fatores de risco associados.

Palavras-chave: animais de companhia; pessoa em situação de rua; zoonoses

ABSTRACT: Homeless has been considered a worldwide public policy problem and may demand a multi-professional intervention with social assistance and health care approaches. Some of these homeless may have close and companion interactions with domestic animals in their environment. Although pets may provide emotional stability, may also contribute to human sheltering refusal and homeless persistence, as pets may not be allowed on most human shelters. Pet presence and environmental exposure may aggravate co-infections in such vulnerable population. Therefore, veterinarian inclusion in such network care frame has been crucial to insure animal health and reduce zoonosis and related risk factor.

Key Words: domestic animals, homeless; zoonosis

INTRODUCTION

Social abandonment has been a main cause of homeless, considered a worldwide public policy issue (NARENDORF et al., 2017, GAETZ et al., 2016). Although maybe difficult to measure how many people live on streets, previous studies have shown

approximately 31,922 homeless (0.06%) in Brazil (WWP, 2009) 549,928 (0.17%) in the United States (NAEH, 2017) and 35,000 (0.10%) in Canada (GAETZ, et.al, 2016). Homeless have been considered persons in vulnerability situation who need an interrelated approach with social, health and psychological care (DAVIES and ALLEN, 2017).

Animal relinquishment to streets has also been a public health problem, mainly in underdeveloped or developing countries (ALBERTHSEN, et al., 2016). Numerous studies have attempted to establish the human-animal interactions including stray dogs, with frequent situation of individual exposure within the social network (SINGER, 1995), clearly demanding a public policy of homeless health care and their animals.

Vulnerability may be defined as a dynamic and multifactorial concept associated to incapability to confront environmental disasters (usually transient) or poverty (transient or permanent) (CHRYSTAL, et al., 2015). Homeless cases have generally been consequence of society unbalance due to exclusion process, fragility by relation breaking, disrespect and/or discrimination (JAHAN, 2017). Such heterogeneous group have reportedly shown extreme experiences with poverty, marginality, health threats, domestic violence, social and mental health problems (BRASIL, 2009, HQO, 2016), aggravated by mental hospital enclosure and patient discharge in the 1980s-1990s (ABDUL-HAMID, 2014).

The Brazilian public policy approach on homelessness have been based on social care and health (Table 1) to ensure the “minimal essential” determined by the federal constitution until establishment of specific programs with own budget and staff.

Primary health professionals have generally been the first contact with these individuals, due to drug abuse, risky sexual illness or pregnancy, mental health disorders, starvation, and increased contact risk with pests and dirt (WHO, 1978, NOEL, et al., 2015). An interdisciplinary approach have contributed to better understand emerging and reemerging illnesses (MWANGI, 2016) and the dimension of the health and social care services in the

most vulnerable urban group due risk exposure.

Although dogs and cats have few recognized rights, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO has declared that all animals are born equal to life and have the right of exist. Not surprisingly, the most important federal law of environmental crimes in Brazil has included the relinquishment as animal abuse (BRASIL, 1998). In addition to abandonment, the number of animal shelters in Brazil have been limited and the rescue and care of the animals mostly taken by independent protectors or small non-profit organizations.

Numerous studies aiming to measure and understand animal abandonment have fail to show a common pet pattern (more female or male, younger or old) (FATJÓ, et al., 2015, NEW, et al., 2000). However, common causes such as aggression toward people or animals, precarious animal health condition, animal characteristics, lifestyle and no apparent owner (SALMAN, 1998) have been consistently observed.

Since species distribution and density may be determined by the dynamics of survival to infectious diseases and environmental factors such as lack of food or running overs (BROWN, 1984), abandoned human beings or animals may stay on urban areas as an invisible group and under street availability of food and shelter. In fact, wandering population may be used as an indicator of environmental deterioration and epidemiological indicator (LERNER, 2015).

Homeless person and animal may be considered as a unit who need a network service for better approaching their situation (SINGER, 1995). The human-animal homeless interactions may provide emotional stability and self-esteem and motivation for both (SINGER,

1995). Even so, this relationship may also contribute in some cases for persistence of homelessness on streets, since sanitary restrictions and regulations may forbid pets in homeless shelters (FERRIGNO, 2015).

Pet prohibition into human shelters seems to rely on potential risk and aggravation of human exposure to infectious agents, mainly due to the possibility of zoonosis transmission as leishmaniasis, spotted fever, toxoplasmosis, leptospirosis, among others. However, increase in morbidity of various illness as HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases, hepatitis B and C and tuberculosis has been considered as consequence of problems accessing and underutilization of medical care (CHRYSTAL, *et al.*, 2015).

Among potential zoonoses transmitted by pets, toxoplasmosis has been considered an environmental disease (SMIELEWSKA-LOS, 2002) as well as leptospirosis, both which may be considered endemic in some urban areas resulting in exposure to infectious pathogens. Homeless may also be living within an environment with food remains, dirt and rodent's presence in their sleeping places (KANG, 2015), posing the human and other animal health conditions at risk.

Co-infections may also be opportunistically common in a vulnerable and immunosuppressed person, as for example the more susceptibility of HIV patients to tuberculosis (TB) infection (JOINT, 2000, CASPERMEYER, 2017), which may increase the risk of morbidity and mortality and be aggravated by drug or alcohol consumption (AUERSWALD, 2016).

Another zoonosis, tuberculosis among homeless has also been a public health challenge, with studies showing higher prevalence, co-infections, reluctance to treatment and consequently drug resistance (WORRELL *et al.*, 2017). Such studies may lack comprehensive

results due to exclusion or discharge of cases for their transient status and difficult logistical to understand homeless to homeless disease transmission. Pets under the same conditions may present the same epidemiological framework, as dogs may develop TB due to their close relationship with infected owners.

Such epidemiological scenario may place homeless human beings and stray pets in similar disease likelihood, sharing urban outdoors risk factors associated to pathogen infection and maintenance. In Brazil, the free-of-charge governmental health network named "Unique Health System" has considered suspected or confirmed infectious diseases as compulsory notifications into the national system. Pets may be excellent sentinels for such diseases, since most infectious pathogens have zoonotic origin.

Table 1 – Review of social and health care laws about homelessness situations in Brazil.

Area	Year	Type	Content
Social care	1998	Federal Constitution	"Minimal essential"
Social care	1993	Law	nº 8.742: National Law of Social Care (LOAS)
Social care	2004	Program	National Program of Social Care (PNAS)
Social care	2005	Law	nº 11.258: Add homeless in program of social care
Social care	2006	Decree	25 th October: Inter-ministry proposal of homeless social inclusion
Social care	2006	Order	nº 381: Guarantee resources and create reference centers
Social care	2008	Law	nº 11.530 and 11.707/2008: National program of public security
Social care	2009	Resolution	CNAS nº 109: Typifies the social care services
Health	2009	Order	nº 3.305: Create a technical health committee for homeless
Social care	2009	Decree	nº 7.503: National politics for homelessness
Social care	2010	Normative Instruction	SNAS/SNARC nº 07: "CadÚnico" to provide access in social care programs
Health	2010	Decree	nº 7.179: National plan to stop crack and another drugs
Social care	2011	Law	nº 12.435: Update LOAS
Health	2011	Order	nº 2.488: Create the National politics of primary health
Health	2011	Order	nº 122: Create 'Consultório na rua', to meet homeless in local
Health	2011	Order	nº 3.088: Psychosocial attention network for mental health
Social care	2013	Resolution	nº 09: Create 'Centro POP', a specific service to homeless

CONCLUSION

Pets should be included on national census and their health considered as part of homeless health, as one of the strongest (or maybe last) bonds to society and its humanitarian

values. Moreover, pets may be excellent animal, public and environmental sentinels in many situations, particularly in zoonotic diseases, making pet health monitoring as of crucial interest for the comprehensive One Health Initiative applied of homelessness.

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