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Analyzing the Effectiveness of Peruvian Children's Shelters through the Child-Care Legal System and the Daily Functions of the Shelters

My original proposal for the Kellogg Institute Research Grant aimed towards analyzing the effectiveness of Peruvian orphanages through participatory observation of children in the institutions and interviews with the staff. In order to be sensitive to the terminology and the fact that most of the children under governmental care do have families, orphanages in Peru are referred to as temporary shelters for children and adolescents. I obtained IRB approval for my intended research and a letter of support from the non-governmental organization I would be working with in Peru since they have an established volunteer relationship with the children's shelters centers in the area. Unfortunately, when I met with the director of the children's shelter to explain my research project and ask for their signed consent, I encountered some complications. In the end, I was able to gather information on how the children's shelters in Peru function in terms of the procedures for child placement in each institution and how the institution itself functions on the day-to-day. The research that I ended up conducting was not what I had proposed to do because of the lengthy approval procedure in the Peruvian legal system for things that have to do with children under governmental care. I was unable to interview the staff at the children's shelters without the approval from the Center for Residential Assistance (CAR), but I was able to observe them as they performed their daily duties.

As alluded to earlier, the biggest challenge that I faced was obtaining consent from the director of the children's shelter in order to conduct my participatory observation study of the

children under her care. I had all of the consent and waiver forms ready in Spanish for the director and the children to sign but I was denied access to conduct research because of a liability and privacy risk for the children involved. For my study to continue, I was told to first gain approval from the Center for Residential Assistance (CAR), which is the department that oversees the children's shelters in that area. I called and emailed the office and a week later was told that the office could not assist me and that I must contact a different department. I contacted the Unit of Protective Services for Boys, Girls, and Adolescents (USPNNA) and a few days later was referred to the Integral Program for Family Welfare (INABIF). INABIF is a program which has administrative autonomy under the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP). Two weeks passed after I first contacted INABIF before I was informed that approval consists of an in-person interview at the Family Court in Lima and provinces. I set the interview up electronically and learned that it would take two to three months to process my request. I was informed numerous times throughout the various phone calls that I made to each of the departments, that if I knew a certain person or someone with that family name, they would be the best people to ask to forward my application along. I experienced the challenge of being a foreigner with no connections to people in the Peruvian legal system to help move my case along or guide me in the proper procedures.

Although I was not able to fully carry out my original proposal, I was able to gain much knowledge about the Peruvian legal system when it comes to child care and about the functions of the children's shelters in general. I learned the proper legal channels a person must go through in order to conduct any research pertaining to children who are temporary wards. Experiencing the first steps of the procedure first hand has given me a better understanding of the Peruvian legal system at large and the many departments that the children's cases must go through as well

in order for them to be returned to their families. Another accomplishment I achieved was the ability to speak with one of the local family law lawyers and obtain information about the legal procedure for the placement of children in the children's shelters and how their cases are handled once they have been admitted. I then went through many of the papers and manuals at the children's shelters, with the director's consent, to verify what I was told and to understand more of the details. I was able to look through these manuals because they are considered public information even though updates are not consistently uploaded to the web. Peru is a country whose legal system is still largely based on paper files and this makes gathering information on the web difficult, but as a researcher at the shelter itself, I had access to all of the public files.

Through these documents and clarifications from the head staff, I learned that a governmental investigation takes place to determine whether or not it is safe for a child to continue living with their parents or legal guardian if there are signs of neglect or abuse. Children also go through the investigation if they are found living on the streets or engaged in activities such as the drug trade or sex trafficking. If the court determines that it is an unsafe environment, the child is admitted into whichever children's shelter has space available for them, even if it is far from their hometown. Sometimes they are placed in shelters well outside their hometown in order to provide them with more security. The legal process from here involves a family court judge who is assigned to work on the child's case for the rest of their time in the system. There are four general steps in the process for children to be readmitted home if that's what they intend, otherwise, they must wait until they turn 18 to be released. Once the child is assigned to an institution, they undergo a psychological, emotional, and physical evaluation in order to determine the Plan of Intervention that the staff at the shelter will conduct with them. This plan is split into two phases in which the child is monitored for emotional stability and for

how well they adapt to the institution. In the meantime, their parents must also go through evaluations of their ability to care for the child and through governmental parenting courses. This usually takes around two years but some children are in the system for as little as nine months while others may last several years depending on their circumstances for being there and their individual progress. If the court decides that the child is ready to return to their family, there is a three-month period in which the child and family receive sporadic visits from the social worker at the shelter where the child lived to evaluate their stability and the well being of the child. The documents also outlined the requirements for the selection of staff, programming for the children's health, education, and counseling, as well as the ways in which the children's shelters would be held accountable.

Along with speaking with the child and family lawyer, sorting through the numerous documents in children's shelter, and speaking with the staff to clarify questions, I was able to spend some time interning as a social work volunteer at one of the children's shelters through the NGO Vive Peru. INABIF has a large volunteer network and believes that volunteers serve an integral role for the readjustment of the children for life outside the shelter. Throughout my time as an intern, I was able to experience and observe the day to day functions of the children's center and compare the information I found in the CAR, USPNNA, and INABIF manuals to the procedures that I saw. I found that they were much in accordance but also noticed the areas in which each shelter is able to dictate their own procedures.

Throughout my time in Peru, I was in constant contact with my senior thesis advisor to determine the best use of my time as I attempted to obtain approval for my research. The information that I gained during the summer is a large component of my senior thesis proposal. My senior thesis for Political Science has the working title of The Effectiveness of Government-

funded Child-Care Institutions in Peru and in the United States. I want to understand why the child-care system in Peru, which focuses primarily on large shelters with an average of forty children, and the child-care system in the United States, which focuses primarily on foster care homes with one child or two children, is preferred in that country and why it is believed to be the most effective system. For this comparison, I must gain knowledge of how each system functions on the ground level. My time at the children's shelter in Peru has provided me with a large insight into Peru's child-care system and will play a large role in the Peruvian portion of my senior thesis. Now I am further along my path of obtaining the information that I need in order to make a proper comparison between the primary child-care systems in Peru and in the United States.