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JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING IN CHILD ABUSE CASES: MEANINGS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM JUDGES AND PUBLIC PROSECUTORS.Catarina Ribeiro¹, Celina Manita²¹*Universidade Católica do Porto, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Porto, Portugal*²*University of Porto, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Porto, Portugal*

Legal procedures in child abuse cases are characterized by a specific complexity. Therefore, we can observe several difficulties in the child-judicial system relationship: proof achieving; testimony credibility assessment limitations; specificities of the forensic examination; a slow moving judicial system and the nature and impact of protection procedures. With this study we aimed to understand, from the judges and public prosecutors perspectives, the trajectories of the relationship between children at risk, child abuse and neglect and the justice system, as well as the meanings that these professionals assign to the different steps, actors and phenomena. This research aims to understand trajectories of the child-judicial system interaction, analyzing roles, and judicial decision-making. The main goals of this study are (i) to find out whether there are processual invariants in the trajectory during the contact with the judicial system; (ii) to understand the meanings assigned by the judges and public prosecutors to its work and decisions; (iii) to find out, from the Judges perspective, whether the child's contact with the justice, in this particular cases, produces phenomena of secondary victimization and in the cases where secondary victimization occurs, to find out in what way and how it actually occurs. Due to the study goals, we choose a qualitative approach. The data were collected through deep interviews, which contents were analyzed by the proceedings of the Grounded Theory.

Keywords: *Judicial decision making; Judges' perceptions; Prosecutor's perceptions; Child Sexual Abuse; Children at Risk*

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