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Children who claim previous life memories: A Case Report and Literature Review

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Abstract:

Objective: Academic investigation of thousands of children who claim past-life memories has been developed worldwide for five decades. However, despite the scientific and clinical significance of this substantial body of research, most clinicians and scientists are not aware of it. This study aims to report a case of a child who claimed memories that match his deceased granduncle's life and to perform a literature review of the main characteristics and implications of children's past-life claims. **Method:** We investigated the case through interviews with the child and first-hand witnesses, and conducted a documental analysis to verify possible associations between the child's statements and facts from the deceased's life. We also performed a CT scan of the child's skull to verify possible associations between anatomical features and a fatal wound from the alleged previous life. **Results:** The child presented most key features typical of such cases of claimed past-life memories. He made 13 statements about the previous life; nine were correct (e.g., the mode of death and a toy the granduncle had) and four were undetermined. The child demonstrated eight unusual behaviors that matched the previous personality's habits, interests, and manners. The child has a birth defect (a rare occipital concavity) that is compatible with the firearm injury that caused the death of his uncle. **Conclusions:** The characteristics of the reported case fit the cross-cultural patterns of children who claim past-life memories, and it has scientific and clinical implications that need to be better known and investigated.

Keywords: Children; Memory; Religion; Spirituality; Reincarnation; Life after death.

Introduction

The belief in reincarnation is widespread throughout places and cultures around the world, and it is a prominent part of Asian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism¹. However, it is also fairly common among Western cultures such as in 33% of the US population, 27% of Western Europe and in 20% of Eastern Europe [2,3]. In Latin America, 20% of people believe in reincarnation, and 37% of Brazilians fully believe in it [4]. Reincarnation may be defined as the idea that human personality (or a component of it) may survive after death and later become associated with another physical body; as a rebirth of the soul, self or spirit[5,6].

Many reports of children claiming past-life memories have been registered throughout history and cultures. However, it was only in the 1960s that the academic investigation of these cases was systematically developed [7,8]. Ian Stevenson (MD), Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia (USA) [9] was the founder and the most prominent researcher in this field, recording nearly one thousand cases of children who claimed past-life memories. His

studies and main findings have been replicated by researchers from Europe, Asia, South America and Australia [8].

A recent review identified 78 scientific articles investigating claimed past-life memories [8]. Most cases were investigated in Asian countries (74%) [10,11]; concerned children who spontaneously claimed past-life memories (84%), and in 41% of them, included a claimed previous family that was identified and interviewed. The main investigated variables included past-life claims, birthmarks or congenital abnormalities allegedly corresponding to a fatal wound in a past life [12,13,14], phobias [15], gender non-conformity [16], skills not learned [17], and memories expressed during play [18]. Most studies followed a methodological approach previously developed by Stevenson [5,8,19,20], and children's past-life claims showed similar patterns in different cultures across the world, such as Lebanon [21], Sri Lanka [22], India [11], USA [23,24], Africa [25], Brazil [20,26,27,28], Japan [29,30], Europe [31], and native peoples in North America [32,33]. In all investigated cultures, most of the cases involved male children; the claims started spontaneously as soon as children were able to speak, faded gradually until completely stopping at about five to eight years of age, and were, in the majority of cases, associated with violent deaths [6]. These cases are described in two categories: a) solved cases, those in which a deceased individual whose life matched the child's statements was identified; b) unsolved cases [34], those in which such a person was not identified. In a worldwide sample of 856 cases, 67% were solved ones [35].

Furthermore, cases of children who claimed past-life memories have raised questions about possible clinical implications for children and their families. Past-life claims have often been associated with phobias or post-traumatic stress disorder-like symptoms related to the mode of death in the claimed previous life (e.g. phobia of water related to drowning) [15,36]. In addition, birthmarks or congenital abnormalities were related to fatal wounds from the claimed past-life [12,13]. Moreover, parents expressed fear of losing their children to the claimed previous family, or, in some cultures, children who claim past-life memories are believed to die earlier [37]. The belief in life after death (or reincarnation) has been shown to be associated with lower levels of psychiatric disorders³⁸ and related to better coping with violent traumas or diseases [39,40]. Finally, past-life claims also raise questions about the mind and brain relationship [41,42,43] and the possibility that consciousness can continue on after death [44,45].

Despite the relevance and the large number of investigated cases of children who claim past-life memories worldwide, the work needs to be better known along with its possible implications on children's development and health. To illustrate and discuss the main features

of children who claim memories of a previous life, we will report the case of a Brazilian child who claimed to be his granduncle who was murdered some decades before his birth. It will also add to the few studies that have been conducted in Brazilian territory [20,26,27,28], and we will analyze how much it fits the cross-cultural patterns of cases of the reincarnation type.

Methods

We followed the procedures recommended by the Consensus-based Clinical Case Reporting Guideline Development – CARE [46].

Research setting and procedures

This case report is part of the larger study “National Survey of Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Brazil”. From March 2019 onward, we have been looking for Brazilians who claim past-life memories. We performed a broad dissemination of our study throughout television, social media, websites, conferences, scientific meetings, etc. Remote online interviews were performed with first-hand witnesses and, whenever possible, with the children.

We verified the main characteristics of the claimed past-life memories and measured the level of cases’ strength through the 22-item scale (Strength-of-case scale - SOCS) that assigns weights to features that strengthen the evidence of an anomalous connection between the child and the claimed past life. Four broad categories are considered: birthmarks or birth defects corresponding to a fatal wound in the previous life, statements that the child has made about the previous life, behaviors that appear related to the previous personality, and the level of acquaintance between the subject and the previous personality. Its score ranges from -10 to 79 [47] (see Table 1). From the 451 participants who completed the informed consent and the online questionnaire, 16 were cases of children (up to 12 years old).

The case reported in this study is the strongest one of our sample of 16 child cases. When the mother filled out the questionnaire (April 1, 2019), her son was five years old. We investigated it *in loco* using the methodological approach previously developed by Stevenson [19]. All first-hand witnesses (the child's mother, father and uncle) were personally interviewed, as well as people who were close to the deceased individual during his life (siblings). When the boy’s mother was interviewed for the first time, the child was six years old and was still claiming the alleged past-life memories. During the first in-person interview, the child was nine years old and most claims had stopped, but said he talked about the alleged mode of death and said he still remembered the sound of the gun. The first author and the last one conducted the remote interviews with the child and his mother. The first author conducted in-person interviews with all first-hand witnesses (mother, father, uncle) as well as the siblings of the

deceased person. All participants were interviewed more than once, independently, and the contents of the interviews were compared to look for possible disparities. The mother and the father were interviewed three times, the uncle and each of the deceased's siblings were interviewed twice. The child was interviewed four times. During all of the follow-up interviews the witnesses were asked if a new claim had been observed. All interviews were recorded (video and/or audio), and transcribed through the software InqScribe®. All of their content was reviewed and corrected when necessary. In addition, we looked for relevant documents (photos, news, birth and death certificates, and police inquiries) that would be helpful to determine if the information claimed by the child was accurate for events in the deceased's life. However, despite an extensive search for the police investigation and the autopsy report related to the murder, we were unable to access them. We were able to locate the granduncle's death certificate. Finally, aiming to investigate further a birth defect located on the child's skull and its possible association with a fatal wound (headshot) of the previous personality, we analyzed a recent cranial CT scan obtained through a multidetector CT scanner, including a 3D reconstruction (Figure 1).

Results

Subject information

This case concerns a nine-year-old boy born in the northeast of Brazil. He is an only child and lives with his parents. According to them, the boy is a sociable and affectionate child who attends school regularly, plays with friends and relatives, and takes care of his pets. The child does not have a history of any mental disorder or congenital disease, but he has asthma and a birth defect (a depression) in the back of his skull. According to his mother, the family is nominally Catholic but does not attend religious services, and the father has some books related to Spiritism, a popular reincarnationist religion in Brazil. Additionally, the claimed previous personality is the child's granduncle who lived in the northeast of Brazil between the 1950s and 1990s, and was murdered at his workplace. The comparison between the alleged previous personality and the child is in Table 2,

(Table 2)

(Table 3)

Case presentation

Roberto¹ was born in the northeast of Brazil during the 1950s and worked as a transport manager at a company. He was a dedicated and disciplined manager and noticed a gap in the company budget and material theft from the mill. He fired the employee he thought was responsible for the robberies. The employee left the plant, returned a few minutes later with a firearm, and shot and killed Roberto.

Nineteen years after Roberto's death, his niece Milena gave birth to a boy named Paulo. Milena had been very close to her uncle and lived with him when she studied in the city where he lived. She stated that Roberto used to treat her like his daughter. His death impacted her greatly, leading her to experience intense grief.

Milena said she observed that Paulo, even in the first year of life, used to keep his arms crossed over his chest, a habit that persisted when he started to take his first steps. This behavior caught her attention because it seemed curious to observe such a habit in a young baby. In addition, later, Paulo developed the habit of walking with his arms crossed behind his back and sometimes putting his hands in his pockets. At that time, Milena remembered that her deceased uncle used to have similar habits, but initially she considered this child's behavior just a custom.

Milena claimed precognitive dreams since adolescence, a fact acknowledged by her friends and relatives. Four years before her son was born, she dreamed of a child sitting on a chair. When she looked at the child, he smiled at her, and she heard a voice saying that he would be her son. When Paulo was two years old, she remembered this dream and noticed a physical resemblance between the child in the dream and her son. Moreover, when Paulo was 15 months old, his mother dreamed that she was talking to an unknown person who said she had stopped dreaming of her uncle because he had returned as her son. Although she initially said she did not believe it and was not impressed, she thought about it and looked for an explanation.

Two days later, she reported the dream to her brother. He said he already knew it because he had had an "intuition". When Milena had Paulo sitting on her lap, her brother "heard a voice" saying that their deceased uncle had returned as that child. Additionally, the brother reported that he has studied Spiritism for many years and claimed to have some mediumistic experiences. According to him, he has gotten such information intuitively and had already assumed that his late uncle had reincarnated as his current nephew, Milena's son.

Between two and three years old, Paulo insisted on staying naked at his home, rejecting being dressed by his mother. When told about this, the child's grandmother (Roberto's sister) affirmed that her deceased brother demonstrated similar behavior as a child.

¹ In order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used.

Between three and four years old, the boy showed great interest in playing at repairing bicycles and tricycles. On one occasion, the child picked up his tricycle and got under it as if he was repairing a vehicle. His mother asked him, "My son, what are you doing under there?" Paulo answered, "I'm fixing the car, Mom. When I grow up, I'm going to fix cars."

He kept stating that he would be an auto mechanic until he was five years old. This also puzzled the mother, since Roberto's work had included car and truck maintenance.

Several times when Paulo was three and a half, he asked his mother, "Mom! Where is my horse? Did you throw it away?" The mother would answer, "What horse? You never had a horse..." Once she asked what this horse looked like, and he replied, "It is white and blue, made of wood, without legs."

Milena reported this to her mother. Although the grandmother is Catholic and totally disbelieves in reincarnation, she said that Roberto had a wooden horse which he used to play with during his childhood, but she could not remember the colors of the toy. It had been hidden by their mom because it had scratched the wooden floor of their house.

Once, Milena asked Paulo, "Son, have you not dreamed about this horse?" The boy replied, "No, Mom. I had a wooden horse". In addition, he mentioned he had a real horse that had been stolen outside his house. He claimed he had left it there but when he returned, the animal was gone.

Milena reported this to her mother, who stated that her brother had acquired a real horse during his adolescence without their parents' consent. Because the animal was making a big mess in their yard, their mother took the animal and sold it when her brother was not at home. The deceased's brother also confirmed this event. Although this situation occurred many decades ago, Paulo believed it had happened recently. He also claimed they had lived in a house with a wooden floor and a large yard and that their mother often rubbed oil on the floor. Milena was puzzled by her son's claims, because they had never lived in a house with a wooden floor. The grandmother and Roberto's other siblings said that their family had lived in a house with a wooden floor when Roberto was a child.

When Paulo was four years old, his mother was in the kitchen preparing food, and the boy called her persistently. She did not answer him, so he said, "Hey, Côca!" Milena then asked him, "What did you say?" And he repeated, "Côca!" She asked him, "Who is Côca?", and he replied, "You are Côca!" Astonished, Milena asked, "Who told you that name?" Paulo replied, "I already knew it!" His mother was very surprised. "Côca" was a nickname that Roberto had given her. Only he (and sometimes his siblings) had called her that. The nickname stopped being used after Roberto was killed. Paulo never had any contact with Roberto's brother and

had only talked a few times by phone with Roberto's sister, as they live far away. Milena was adamant that Paulo had never told about the nickname. Milena then told Paulo, "My uncle called me that". The child replied that he already knew her uncle but could not remember his name. Milena asked if he had children, and the child answered, "Yes, two children" (which is correct for Roberto), but could not remember their names.

When Paulo was about four to five years old, he frequently asked his mother, "Mom, why have you stopped giving me that yellow fruit?" Milena answered, "Which yellow fruit? Banana? Mango?" The child answered, "No! That yellow fruit!" Roberto's brother reported that Roberto had the habit of eating bananas with powdered milk.

When Paulo was five, his mother was talking on the phone to his grandmother, who had just had an accidental gas explosion in her home. The child asked his mother, "Why are you so worried?" She replied, "It would be sad if grandma died..." Paulo answered, "I have already died and came back several times," and continued, "Life goes on, and it does not end when you die." He added, "Children can choose their parents, and I chose you to be my mother." Paulo's parents claim they do not have clear opinions regarding reincarnation and did not talk about religion, reincarnation, or life after death.

At two years old, Paulo was watching TV with his mother when a scene of gunfire broke out. Paulo suddenly screamed in fear and cried uncontrollably, behavior that was unusual for him. Later, at about six years old, while resting on the beach with his parents, he spontaneously stated, "Mom, I was at work when a thief came, and there was a robbery. The robber fired four shots at me. The shot that killed me hit my head." Milena asked, "Why did the robber do that?" and Paulo replied, "I don't know." During the conversation he became very emotional, with eyes full of tears, and he asked, "Why did he shoot me four times? I died after the first shot." His mother asked, "What happened after that?" Paulo answered, "I felt water beneath me, and I saw a light. Then everything was getting dark."

More recently, Paulo has shown interest in military careers and for physical activities. Roberto, according to his siblings, studied in a military school and enjoyed this environment, being also very disciplined with his daily physical activities

(Table 4)

Birth defect assessment

Paulo has a birth defect that has intrigued his parents, a depression ("a hole") on the back of his skull. His pediatrician said that such a condition seemed normal and would disappear

over time. However, the birth defect is still present and clearly palpable. A recent cranial CT scan obtained with a 3D reconstruction showed two findings: “concavity in the median region of the lower occipital bone and a rectification of the parietal skullcap in the paramedian left region”. (Figure 1)

(Figure 1)

Discussion

This study reports the case of a Brazilian child who made 13 spontaneous statements concerning an alleged past-life, and nine were accurate regarding the life of his granduncle, who was murdered two decades before. The boy also showed eight behaviors that matched the habits and interests of this deceased relative. This case’s characteristics fit cross-cultural patterns verified among a worldwide variety of past-life claims [6,48]. The score of 19 points on the Strength-of-Case Scale measurement (Table 1) is higher than the mean of 10.4 in a sample of 799 cases [47].

Most children who claim previous lives start to do it spontaneously (without any intervention; e.g. hypnosis) between two and five years old, when they start to speak coherently, and then gradually stop recounting their claims, which usually fade out completely by the age of eight years old [6,49,50]. Among 236 cases, children started to claim past-life memories by the age of 37 months on average and stopped by 80 months [35]. However, some children retain some of their claimed memories until adulthood [21]. There is a male predominance [6,49], as verified in a worldwide sample of 1152 cases (63%), except in Sri Lanka, where females were predominant [25]. Most of these children refer to the cause of death during their alleged previous lives, and it was usually associated with violence, such as murder, fatal accidents, suicide, etc. [49]. Among 684 worldwide cases, 72% mentioned the mode of death, and 61% were violent [5,35].

Among 10 solved Brazilian cases, six had violent deaths (three by suicide), but of the six unsolved Brazilian cases, four seem to have ended violently [51, 20,26,28]. In the present case, the child made six statements concerning a violent death in his alleged previous life (Table 4 – items 1 to 6). Three of these statements were considered correct: the alleged previous personality was killed in his workplace by a coworker with several gunshots (one in the head). Even though he was not precisely a “robber” as the child claimed, the murderer was stealing money from his company. It is unlikely a young child could tell the difference. No statement

about the death was false and three (victim died after the first shot; the number of shots; there was water under the victim) were not possible to determine precisely.

Children who claim previous life memories often have birthmarks or birth defects that match fatal wounds of the alleged previous personality [12,13]. Stevenson has pointed out that these biological correlates are important features because they might provide objective evidence superior to those that rely only on informants' memories. Therefore, documents and technological resources can be used as evidence of a correspondence between the birthmark and the fatal wound in a claimed past life [52]. The large and rare concavity at the back of the child's skull is compatible with an exit wound produced by a gunshot. Although we know the uncle died with a headshot, we were not able to determine the bullet's trajectory through the skull to check if the birth defect matches the exit wound. However, it is likely that the entry wound would be frontal and the exit on the back of the head. (Figure 1).

It is also common that these children present what Stevenson called "behavioral memories," distinctive behavior patterns (often expressed during play [18]) matching the previous personality [13]. In our study, the child presented eight such behaviors (items 14 to 21, Table 4). The alleged previous personality was a mechanical engineer who had worked with transport management during his life, and the child played at fixing vehicles and said he wished to be a car mechanic in adulthood. Two other unusual behaviors compatible with the deceased uncle were keeping his arms crossed and the insistence of walking naked at home.

One situation that especially impressed the child's mother was when the boy called her by the nickname "Côca" that her deceased uncle used to call her (Item 13 – Table 4). According to the woman, it was a very specific nickname that was created and used by the deceased and sometimes by his siblings. After his death, the nickname was no longer spoken, and she lost contact with her relatives that were close to him. The deceased's siblings live hundreds of kilometers away and never met the child. The deceased's brother never had any contact with the child, and one of the deceased's sisters had only talked to the boy a few times by telephone. The only one of the deceased's sibling who knows the child is his grandmother, who lives two hundred kilometers away from the boy and they rarely meet. In addition, they have never talked about the deceased uncle, and all witnesses confirmed that they have never called the child's mother by the mentioned nickname. Moreover, one of the two deceased's sons is living abroad and the other lives in a city two hundred kilometers away from the child. The widow also does not know the child. Consequently, the communication between the child and these relatives did not happen, and it is improbable that the child had learned the nickname through social interaction with his family and relatives.

According to 545 cases from twelve countries [25,35,53], the median intermission length (period between alleged death and rebirth) ranged from 4 to 141 months. Among fifteen countries/cultures, including Brazil, the median intermission length was 69 months [06]. In a review of published Brazilian cases [51] the median intermission length of ten solved cases was 41.5 months, and 15 months for seven same-family cases. However, in this reported case it was 228 months (1994-2013). Some studies have reported children's statements related to claimed "intermission memories" [54]. Five of 78 academic studies of past-life memories described this phenomenon [8] with children reporting they saw the preparation of their own funeral, tried to contact grieving relatives, followed their future parents, or stayed in a particular location where they had a schedule or duties related to their previous personality [55]. Children with intermission memories, compared with those without, tend to remember more names and make more accurate statements about the claimed previous life [54,55]. The child reported in this study claimed memories related to the alleged intermission period such as seeing a light after being killed, and this statement fits descriptions of near-death or end of life experiences [49,56,57]. The child also reported having chosen his parents in the intermission period.

It is also common for mothers or persons close to the children to claim that a supposed rebirth was announced to them in dreams [5,6,58]. These dreams occur in different frequencies and vary in character depending on the culture. There are reports of dreams in which someone requested permission to be reborn through that woman, and others in which someone only stated that a rebirth would happen. Some occur before conception, and others in the final months of pregnancy, shortly before birth, or even after a child is born [6,58]. In our case, the mother claimed that she usually has precognitive dreams and also reported a dream in which her uncle's rebirth was announced.

The main initial hypothesis to consider in the investigation of children's past-life claims is the possibility of socio-psychological influence on child behavior and statements. Consequently, investigations have to consider the level of acquaintance between the current and the supposed previous family, aiming to verify to what extent the children's claims may be the result of a possible interaction between the two families, and how much the claims have been fostered and embellished by their parents' and relatives' interests. The level of families' interaction varies in three ways: a) family connection (same-family case); b) acquaintance connection; c) no connection or stranger cases ⁴⁹. In a worldwide sample of 783 cases, 51% were same-family cases, 28% acquaintance cases, and 21% were stranger cases [25,52,59]. More specifically, among seven solved cases studied in Brazil, four cases were same-family, two acquaintance, and none were stranger cases [26,27,28]. In a recent Brazilian study of 21

Brazilian cases, 10 were solved, and six of these were same-family [60]. In stranger cases, if possible, it is desirable to start the investigation and record the claims before the contact between the two families, avoiding the possibility of information sharing [61]. Contrary to the socio-psychological hypothesis, in a study of 103 cases in India and Sri Lanka, the percentage of correct statements regarding the previous life was very similar between cases with written records made before verification (77%) and those with written afterwards (78%) [62]. In addition, studies have verified that most of children's mothers did not welcome their children's past-life claims and behaviors, either because they did not believe in reincarnation, they felt afraid of losing their child to the previous family, or even because past-life memories could be overwhelming for those children [37]. It is worth keeping in mind that most such memories do not refer to a glamorous life, but to ordinary ones that often ended with a tragic and violent death.

Although the case reported here matches most features of typical reincarnation type cases, some limitations may be considered. It is a same family case and the child's uncle is an adherent of a reincarnationist religion. Despite much effort, we could not access official records about the fatal wound of the child's granduncle. Considering the mother's affection for her deceased uncle, it is possible she and other relatives may have unintentionally induced the child's claims. However, the mother repeatedly shared how worried and anxious she got over the years seeing her boy dealing with that phenomenon, fearing he could go crazy.

The possible influence of religious traditions and beliefs might be considered. On the one hand, the child's uncle is an adherent of Spiritism, a popular reincarnationist religion in Brazil [4]. His father has a few Spiritist books, but does not attend any worship, and he and his wife affirmed that they did not talk about Spiritism or spiritual issues at home. On the other hand, the child's mother and most of the child's relatives are Catholic and do not believe in reincarnation. Although families' religious beliefs have to be considered as a significant psychosocial variable that seems to influence children's past-life claims, strong cases have also been reported in cultures where reincarnationist beliefs are not predominant, such as Europe [31], the USA [24,63] and Brazil [20,26,27,28].

Additionally, it is worth noting that the brutal death was a traumatic situation for the whole family. Furthermore, the family had been threatened by people close to the murderer during the criminal prosecution, and they were forced to "keep their mouths shut." Consequently, the relatives preferred not to talk about the case, choosing to forget it and never again get involved with legal issues regarding it.

Moreover, although this is a same-family case, most of the deceased's relatives live far away and don't know the boy, and those who do know him stated emphatically that they have never talked about the deceased uncle with the child.

Actually, no one appeared comfortable in talking about the deceased. During the interviews, all of them cried when talking about him because of the emotional impact of the violent death and the threats they received. When asked directly, the boy said he did not know about his granduncle's life and did not personally know any of the deceased's siblings, children or friends (except his grandmother, who lives about 200 km away). In a provoking test using some unknown photos for him, he was not able to spontaneously identify his granduncle among other persons.

In addition, the boy presented a cluster of behaviors, interests and claimed memories that were not expected in his family, but that fit very closely the deceased's personality (items 14 to 21 – Table 4). Examples include behaviors such as walking naked, as well as playing as a mechanic and wanting to be one in the future, while being in a family where nobody close to the child is interested in mechanics or even in cars. Moreover, the child claimed very specific and unlikely information with verified accuracy, such as a wooden horse and a stolen real horse, a house with wooden floors, calling his mother “Côca”, being a father of two children, and claiming to have been killed by a headshot (items 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12,13 – Table 4)

Furthermore, the child consistently expressed proper emotions regarding the alleged previous life, speaking about his alleged death with a strong emotional content, which is not expected when a child is just expressing a simple fantasy. His strong reaction to the shooting scene on TV (Table 2), screaming and crying a lot would be unusual to a two years-old child. However, this reaction might resemble phobic behavior and post-traumatic stress disorder-like symptoms compatible with the claimed mode of death that is common in past-life memories studies [15,21].

Although the socio psychological or fantasy hypothesis might be a good explanation for many cases of children who claim past-life memories, it may not completely fill in the blanks of this case. Another kind of evidence against it is the strong similarity of features and development to the transcultural patterns that have been reported worldwide. These include claims starting around two years old, phobias and phobias, announcing dreams, a violent death and related birth defects. All those claims and habits have emerged gradually over time, suggesting an unplanned pattern, lowering the possibility of a specific moment of learning all the information about the deceased. Overall, without an identified mode of learning about the

deceased uncle, there is a marked accuracy between the child's statements, behaviors and habits and his granduncle's life.

The current case also has some strengths. First, the child was interviewed when the claimed memories were still present, and we were able to personally interview different first-hand witnesses. Although most witnesses live far away from each other and were usually interviewed separately, there was a high concordance between their reports and the child's claims. Additionally, the interviewer, the child, and all the witnesses speak the same language, so no interpreter was needed, avoiding a possible interpreter bias. Further, the computed tomography of the child's skull shows an intriguing and atypical birth defect in the back of his skull, raising the possibility that the child has a mark in his body that is associated with a fatal wound from his claimed previous life. Previous studies of children who claimed past-life memories also investigated associations between deadly wounds inflicted by gunshot in the head region during an alleged past life and birthmarks or birth defects verified during a current life [12,13, 64, 65]. In some cases, birthmarks were associated with the bullets' entry and exit wounds. Additionally, birthmarks and birth defects included hypo and hyperpigmentation in the skin, alopecia, meningocele, and skull and ear malformations [12]. Moreover, cranial trauma in handgun executions was shown in forensic studies [66].

The main hypotheses usually raised to explain cases of alleged past-life memories are: a) deliberate fraud by the family, b) socio-psychological influence, c) a psychiatric disorder, d) possible child's extrasensory perception skills [67], and e) reincarnation. Regarding deliberate fraud by the family, the case is not a well-known one, we did not identify any objective gain by the child or his family resulting from this report, and all witnesses separately were in strong agreement. Consequently, the hypothesis of deliberate fraud is unlikely for this case. Concerning a possible psychiatric disorder, all interviewees affirmed that the child shows behaviors compatible with his age, a good level of socialization and interaction, and no symptoms of a depressive, anxious or dissociative disorder. In addition, the interviewers were a clinical psychologist and a psychiatrist, neither of whom saw any evidence of a mental disorder.

On the other hand, considering that we did not identify any probable normal means of communication for this case, it is possible to raise the unconventional hypotheses of extrasensory perception and reincarnation. The extrasensory hypothesis poses that the child would acquire information through clairvoyance and telepathy. However, there is no evidence this child has such skills, and it is hard to explain his behaviors such as unusual interests and fears. One final possibility is that the case to be what the participants claim it to be, a

reincarnation of the deceased granduncle. This is, indeed, a very challenging and complex hypothesis that has been scientifically investigated by several researchers worldwide. Moreover, although Ian Stevenson and James Matlock have proposed theories to explain the reincarnation phenomena [6], it still remains an important issue that needs attention. In the spirit of a truly scientific and rational inquiry, the reincarnation hypothesis should not be *a priori* rejected or accepted, but properly tested [44,45,68].

Conclusion

The characteristics of the reported case illustrate well the cross-cultural patterns seen among a worldwide variety of cases concerning children who claim past-life memories. They include children's early claims of past-life memories, fears, birth defects, particular behaviors and interests. This recurrent and transcultural human experience should be better known by clinicians and scientists dealing with human mind and behavior. In addition to the clinical relevance for the children and their parents (e.g.: phobias, anxiety, unusual behavior, etc.), the implications for understanding the nature of the mind and its relationship to the body deserve to be acknowledged and investigated more regarding their features and explanatory hypotheses.

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Table 1 – Strength of case measurement

Item	Presence	Score
1. Corresponding to fatal wound on deceased individual		
a) Verified by medical records		8
b) Verified by friends or relatives of deceased	X	5
c) Claimed by subject but not verified		2
2. Corresponding to nonfatal wound on deceased individual		
a) Verified by medical records		5
b) Verified by friends or relatives of deceased		3
c) Claimed by subject but not verified		1
3. Disease or infirmity related to deceased individual		
a) Verified by medical records		4
b) Verified by friends or relatives of deceased		2
c) Claimed by subject but not verified		1
Statements about the previous life		
4. Subject claims to remember previous life		
a) Yes	X	0
b) No, claim made only on basis of other evidence		-2
5. Statements about places or people as they appeared during previous life, these appearances having since changed		5
6. Statements about the previous life verified as correct minus incorrect		
> 20		8
11 – 20		5
06 – 10	X	3
01 – 05		1
0		0
-1 – (-5)		-2
- 6 – (-10)		-5

< - 10		-8
Behavior		
7. Unusual dietary cravings or avoidances related to previous life	X	3
8. Unusual methods of eating or table manners related to previous life		3
9. Unusual use of intoxicants related to previous life		3
10. Unusual phobias related to previous life		3
11. Unusual skills or aptitudes related to previous life		3
12. Unusual animosities related to previous life		3
13. Unusual phobias related to previous life		3
14. Behavior related to that of the opposite sex		
a) According to friends or relatives		3
b) According to subject or investigator only		1
15. Desire or reluctance to return to previous family or place		
a) Strong desire		3
b) Moderate desire		1
c) Neutral		0
d) Moderate reluctance		3
e) Strong reluctance		3
16. Memories of previous life expressed in play	X	3
Connection to deceased individual		
17. Identification of deceased individual		
a) By academic investigators		3
b) By other investigators		2
c) By family or friends	X	1
18. Association between the two families before case developed		
a) Close association or same family	X	-2
b) Slight association		-1

c) Knew about each other but no association		0
d) Total strangers unknow to each other		5
19. Distance (in km) between child's birthplace and deceased individual's main residence		
a) 0.0 – 1.5		0
b) 1.6 – 24.9		2
c) 25.0 or more	X	5
20. Difference in social status between child and deceased individual		
a) Slight		1
b) Moderate		2
c) Great		3
21. Difference in economic status between child and deceased individual		
a) Slight	X	1
b) Moderate		2
c) Great		3
22. Difference in caste of subject and deceased individual with score equal to difference in ranking by Brahmin-Kshatriya-Kayashita-Vaishya-Sudra-Untouchable		-
Total		19

Table 2: Child and deceased individual information

	Child	Deceased
Birth	2013	1951
Death	-	1994
Sex	Male	Male
Location	Paraiba/Brazil	Pernambuco/Brazil
Race/Ethnicity	White	White
Education	Elementary	University

Table 3 – Timeline of child's statements and unusual behaviors occurrences

Age (months)	Situation			
00 - 24	Habit of keeping his arms crossed.	Habit of walking with his arms backward and sometimes putting his hands in his pockets.	His mother dreamed that a voice said that her son is her murdered uncle.	Very scared and started to cry and scream during a TV shooting scene.
25- 47	Insistence on walking nude at home.	Habit of playing as a car mechanic.	Asked about his wooden horse and a real horse that was stolen from him.	-
48 – 60	Called his mother “Côca”.	Craving for a yellow fruit.	-	-
61 – 72	Claimed he had died and come back several times, that children can choose their parents and he had chosen his mother.	Claimed that he was killed with four shots and one was in his head.	-	-
73 – 108	Interest in the military careers.	Interest in physical activities.	-	-

Table 4 – Verification of the child's statements' accuracy and behaviors associations with the previous personality.

Item	Source of information	Verification of match with child's grand-uncle	Comments	
01. I was killed with four shots.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All of the deceased's siblings were interviewed.	The number of shots was not exactly defined. The deceased's brother and one sister said that there were three or more shots. The other sister said that there were two shots.	?
02. A thief killed me.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings, the child's mother, father and uncles.	The murderer was a man involved in a theft scheme in the company.	+
03. I was working when I was murdered.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings, child's mother, father, uncles and the death certificate.	The crime happened where the deceased worked.	+

04. One shot was in my head.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All the deceased's siblings, the child's mother, father, and his uncles.	All of the deceased's siblings have affirmed that one of the shots hit the victim's head. One of the victim's nephews accessed the legal files of the crime, and saw that one of the shots went through the victim's head.	+
05. I died after the first shot.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	-	This claim probably refers to a subjective experience, and it was not possible to verify its accuracy.	?
06. There was water under me when I died.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	-	Despite the fact that the boy said "water", relatives confirmed that the victim remained on the ground after the shots and there was a pool of blood under his body. But, it was not possible to verify its accuracy.	?
07. I had a wooden horse.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings and the mother.	The deceased had a wooden horse.	+
08. My wooden horse was blue and white.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings.	The relatives did not remember what colors the wooden horse was.	?

09. I had a real horse.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings.	He was very fond of horses and he brought a horse into the house and left it in the backyard.	+
10. My horse was stolen from me.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings.	Their mother sold the animal to a stranger. When the boy arrived at home, he could not find the animal.	+
11. The house had a wooden floor.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	All deceased's siblings.	The deceased lived in a house with wooden floors in his childhood.	+
12. I had two sons	Child's mother, father and uncle.	Death certificate and relatives.	The deceased had two children.	+
13. Called his mother by the nickname "Coca".	Child's mother.	All deceased's siblings.	The deceased and his siblings used to call their niece by the nickname "Coca". The child's mother insisted that her son has never heard this nickname because the child does not know the deceased's siblings personally, or his sons and the widow.	+
<i>UNUSUAL BEHAVIORS</i>				
14. Keeping his arms crossed while talking.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	Child's mother and uncle.	It was a habit of the deceased.	+

15. Interest in the Hulk character.	Child's mother, father and uncle.	Child's mother and uncle.	Deceased had interest in the Hulk character.	+
16. Calling others by the nickname "Mestre" (i.e., master).	Child's mother, father and uncle.	Child's mother and uncle.	The deceased usually called others by the nickname "Mestre".	+
17. Habit of walking naked at home.	Child's mother and father	Child's grandmother.	The deceased had the same habit when he was child.	+
18. Used to play fixing cars.	Child's mother and father	Child's mother, uncle, and all of the deceased's siblings.	The deceased was a mechanical engineer and worked as vehicle manager. The interest in cars is not common in the child's family.	+
19. Interest in physical activities	Child's mother and father	Child's mother, uncle, and all of the deceased's siblings.	The deceased was very focused on practicing physical activities.	+
20. Interest in a military career	Child's mother and father	Child's mother, uncle, and all of the deceased's siblings.	The deceased studied in a military school and was interested in militarism.	+
21. Craving for a yellow fruit.	Child's mother and father.	Deceased's brother	The deceased liked bananas a lot.	+

+ Verified (17)

- Incorrect (0)

? Indeterminate (4)



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