Does Placement Type Matter? Comparing the Well-Being of Care-Experienced Young Adults in Northern Ireland


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Does placement type matter?

Comparing the well-being of care-experienced young adults in Northern Ireland

Montserrat Fargas Malet
Dominic McSherry

This is a longitudinal study that has been following all the 747 children who were in care and under 5 years old on 31 March 2000 in Northern Ireland. It aims to compare how these young people (now aged 18 to 27) got/got on in their different types of placement. It also seeks to explore what other factors help or hinder their life chances and their general well-being.

WHAT IMPACTS WELLBEING

NEGATIVE IMPACT / CHALLENGES

- Bullying
- Bereavement
- Unemployment
- Birth family rejection/history

Positive Impact

- Meaningful hobbies
- Family & friends support
- Therapeutic support

Tennessee Self-Concept Scale
Second Edition Short Form

T-scores of 40 or below are considered low. Individuals with low scores are double or half of their own worth. Seven out of 72 (22.2%) that completed the questionnaire had low T-scores (5 foster care, 2 kinship care, 1 adopted and 1 subject to RO).

SELF-CONCEPT

THE STUDY

SO FAR, 48 young people and/or their foster/adoptive/kinship parents/carers have taken part

- 13 in foster care
- 7 in kinship foster care
- 14 adopted (5 by a family member)
- 12 Residence Orders (4 by family)
- 3 lived with birth parents

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of wellbeing is very complex, and has been defined in a range of ways. According to Dodge et al. (2022), it is about having the psychological, social and physical resources needed to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. Here, the resources we have focused on are some health dimensions, self-concept and life satisfaction, although this study is exploring a range of others (e.g. social support).

Because of the yet small numbers of participants, it is difficult to draw confident conclusions. Most young people in the study are showing good levels of wellbeing (based on these dimensions), but there is a proportion that struggled in the past, with a few (still) struggling now. Placement type does not appear to be the main force behind any differences in wellbeing. While more young people in certain placement types appear to enjoy higher levels of life satisfaction or self-worth (i.e. adoption), the differences are too small. Also, in other respects, some young people in these same placements are showing difficulties, particularly in terms of mental health. A range of challenges are appearing to be tipping the balance of wellbeing. These include bullying, bereavement of close relatives/friends, unemployment, and family rejection. On the other hand, some factors are having a positive impact, including sense of belonging to a family, becoming a parent, support from friends and family, paid work, and therapeutic support.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

- 88% were described by their parents/carers to be in a very healthy or healthy overall state of health (42 out of 48)
- The adoptive parents of 3 (out of 14 adopted young people) described their state of health as not very healthy/unhealthy  
- The same was true for 3 young people that were/had been in long-term foster care, & 2 others in long-term kinship care.
- 38% were suffering from a long-standing illness or disability (16 out of 48)
- 25% were having/had behavioural problems (17 out of 48) (for 15, it was a current issue) according to their parents/care
- 9% young people had been diagnosed with autism (out of 48)
- 38% were suffering/had suffered from depression and/or anxiety (18 out of 48) (for 17, it was a current issue) according to their parents/care
- 21% were self-harmed, suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide (15 out of 48)
- 9% ever self-harmed, suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide (15 out of 48)
- 5% were self-harmed, suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide (15 out of 48)

SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

Mean values for each placement type

- Life satisfaction
- Things you do in your life worthwhile
- Happy percentage

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE

EMAIL: m.fargas@qub.ac.uk
@MFargas_QUB

BLOG: http://blogs.qub.ac.uk/pathways

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