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


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This is a longitudinal study that has been following all the 174 children who were in care and under 5 years old on 31st March 2000 in Northern Ireland. It aims to compare how these young people (now aged 18 to 27) get 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**
- **UNEMPLOYMENT**
- **GRIEVEMENT**
- **ARTISTIC REJECTION**
- **SELF-CONCEPT**

The study shows that these young people have faced significant challenges. Bulllying has a really big impact, and it was really really bad. And then the social services made me go to counselling because of all the bullying I tried to kill myself when I was fourteen or fifteen.

- **MAEVE, 19, lived with her granny and then uncle**

- **BRANDON, 19, lived in long-term foster care**

POSITIVE IMPACT

- **PAID WORK**
- **FAMILY & FRIENDS SUPPORT**
- **THEATRICAL SUPPORT**
- **MEANINGFUL HOBBIES**

She (foster mum) is just a great lady in general. The way I see it she basically saved me at a young age so she did it probably be nothing without her. So I would. So she basically took me in. She raised me. I just think she had the patience to instil in me. I would say it’s all down to her, not down to me at all. I pushed every button.

- **TENNESSEE SECF/CONCEPT SCALE**

The scores of 40 or below are considered low. Individuals with low scores are double of their own worth. Seven out of 17 (22%) that completed the questionnaire had low T-scores (foster care, kinship care, one adopted and one subject to RO).

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of well-being is very complex, and has been defined in a range of ways. According to Dodge et al. (2012), 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 the balancing 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.

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

- **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**
  - 85% were described by their parents/careers to be in a very healthy or healthy overall state of health (18 out of 48).
  - 15% were suffering from a long-standing illness or disability (6 out of 48).
  - 17% were having/had a major behavioural problem (7 out of 48) (for 15, it was a current issue) according to their parents/careers.
  - 14% were suffering from depression and/or anxiety (8 out of 48) (for 15, it was a current issue) according to their parents/careers.
  - 14% had been diagnosed with autism (out of 48).
  - 13% were ever self-harmed, suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide (7 out of 48).

- **SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING**

- **IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE**
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