

Transition from Care to Independent Living: Leaving Care as a Process

Results from a Panel Study in SOS-Children's-Villages-Facilities in Germany

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In Germany about 96.000 children and young people live in several forms of out of home care and about 75.000 in foster care. The aim of the public child and youth welfare system is to support their development towards an independent and socially responsible personality. This process starts during care and continues in the transition phase when young people leave the care system and become an independent Care Leaver.

To give Care Leavers a voice and learn more about the situation of young people in and after care SOS Children's Villages (SOS-CV) Germany established an ongoing panel study in 2014. Participants are adolescents in care and Care Leavers from SOS CV-Facilities in Germany, with data on some cases sampled since 2011. In the longitudinal sample youths between 12 and 18 years of age are included and followed up into living independently as Care Leavers. Overall the sample consists of about 1500 youth surveyed while living in SOS CV-facilities, 234 of them could already be followed up as Care Leavers until 2018. The 2020 survey is still running.

The main research questions of the study are: What do youths in care need to manage to cope well with transition to independent living as Care Leavers? How can they be supported by the facilities and co-workers to build up resources for coping this transition? How do Care Leavers cope with the transition in fact? What are burdens and resources during the process? Are they able to establish an independent living situation which fits their needs and visions? How can the care system support them during and after the transition up to their needs?

The longitudinal study is based on a mixed-methods approach. Every two years all participants answer a questionnaire with various scales and items on personal, social and environmental topics, adapted to age and living situation in or after care. While they live in care also their caregivers are questioned on related issues. In the intermediate years interviews are conducted with selected samples of youths in care and their caregivers, and Care Leavers also.

Central construct of the study is Capability to Act, a dynamic sense of confidence to deal especially with unknown and challenging situations. It is based on the concepts Sense of Coherence, Self-Efficacy and Resilience. Empirical results lead to a multidimensional concept but also an overall value of Capability to Act may be used like in this contribution. Capability to Act is formed by lifelong experiences. Therefore Capability to Act has a stable component evolving since early childhood. It also can change due to new experiences, e.g. with a change of social interactions in the transition from family to care, socio-educational interventions, or by the course of major life events like the transition from care to independent living. Capability to Act is a central personal resource for coping with unknown and challenging situations.

Our poster focuses on Capability to Act in the course of transition to independent living. We identified some ways of supporting Capability to Act in care and some types of expectations on the leaving care process. Starting during care we identified four types of developing Capability to Act in the course of the transition. In addition we examine how they are related to experiences with

professional support, especially participation and attendance during the transition. Care Leavers manage their lives after care differently. We describe groups of Care Leavers with varied needs of support accordingly.

Our results show that Capability to Act as a personal resource can be supported but also corrupted. Professional support and participation that fit individual needs are crucial for positive outcomes. The importance of these factors is not limited to care and the care leaving phase but extends beyond.

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