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## Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placement in Israel

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# ABSTRACTS

## Number and characteristics of children in residential facilities

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In the past decade, we have witnessed various reforms in child welfare in Israel, encouraging the diversion of more resources to develop community settings, in order to create a range of suitable alternatives for children able to remain with their families, while retaining sufficient out-of-home placement options for children unable to remain in the community. As a result, changes are expected in both the number of children in residential facilities, and their characteristics. This paper describes the trends in the population of residential facilities in the past decade, concerning two aspects: the change in the number of children in residential facilities and in the characteristics of children in intensive facilities (therapeutic, rehabilitative and post-hospitalization residential facilities).

The data analyzed are based on two main sources: (1) administrative data from the social service payment system and the basic data system of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services for the years 2000-2010, and (2) data from the RAF (Regulation, Assessment, Follow-up) database of the Ministry's Service for Children and Youth, including, inter alia, the characteristics of the children of that period. The data indicate a decline in the number of children in residential facilities, and a certain worsening of their condition, although not universally in all parameters. Problems in family relationships were the most prevalent throughout the years examined. One

possible direction for action is therefore placing more emphasis on work with families. Another recommendation is to develop treatment options in residential facilities for high-frequency problems, as well as plan suitable training for the staff.

**Keywords:** children at risk, out-of-home placement, residential facilities, foster care, characteristics of children and youth

## Background factors associated with ADHD among children in residential care and the relationships between ADHD and their behavioral, social and emotional functioning

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This study focuses on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) among children and adolescents living in welfare residential facilities in Israel, under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. This study examined the background factors associated with ADHD and the relationships between the emotional and behavioral state of children diagnosed with ADHD in residential facilities. The study is based on a secondary analysis of the RAF database. The sample consisted of 5,563 children from rehabilitative, therapeutic and post-hospitalization welfare residential settings. The main findings of the study indicate that more than a third of the entire population of children and adolescents in residential facilities are diagnosed as having ADHD. There is a large gender gap, where almost half of the boys are diagnosed with ADHD compared to a fourth of the girls. We found that children with ADHD experience more emotional, social and behavioral problems compared with those without ADHD.

The discussion emphasizes the need to address residents with ADHD in a combined educational-therapeutic approach and provides several suggestions for future development in this area.

**Keywords:** children at risk, residential facilities, ADHD

## Emotional and behavioral functioning of children and youth in residential care: The contribution of personal characteristics, victimization experiences and social climate

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The study examines the emotional and behavioral functioning of 1,314 adolescents (aged 11 to 19) residing in 32 rehabilitative and therapeutic residential care settings for children at risk under the responsibility of the Welfare Ministry. It focuses on the characteristics of the child and his or her family (age, gender, ethnicity, frequency of contact with parents) as well as characteristics related to their lives in the institution (i.e., victimization by peers while in care and the social climate of the setting). Data collection was based on anonymous self-report structured questionnaires completed by the youth in the care setting. The findings suggest that girls, younger and Jewish respondents were more vulnerable to psychosocial difficulties compared with boys, older youth and Arab respondents. Adolescents who reported on higher levels of victimization by peers had poorer psychosocial functioning. Psychosocial functioning of the adolescents who reported higher levels of victimization by peers were found to be more problematic. Finally, young people who evaluated the staff as more supportive and less strict, and the other children as more friendly and showing fewer problematic behaviors were found to report on better psychosocial functioning. The study enables the identification of groups of young people at risk of poorer emotional-behavioral adjustment. It emphasizes the importance of directing more resources to combat and prevent peer violence and to improve the institution's social climate.

**Keywords:** out-of-home care, residential care, children at-risk, emotional and behavioral adjustment, social climate, violence

## The degree of inclusion in educational models and parental decisions regarding out-of-home placement for low functioning children with autism

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The process parents undergo when deciding to seek out-of-home placement for their child with low functioning autism (LFA) has been traditionally studied retrospectively or concomitantly with the actual placement. Little is known about the process leading up to the decision to seek out-of-home placement and the variables which affect this process. The present research investigated this process as it was related to parents' degree of satisfaction from educational services. Specifically, this research focused on inclusion models implemented at the schools in which the students with autism were learning and the relationship with the anticipated decision of parents to consider out of home placement for their low functioning children with autism. In this research, out of home placement was studied prospectively, by analyzing the answers parents provided when asked at what age they would hypothetically consider out-of-home placement for their child with LFA. Findings revealed that higher degrees of satisfaction from educational services positively correlated with a later out-of-home placement age. Specifically, the two variables significantly correlated whereby the intent to have children stay at home longer was related to the amount of inclusion the students experienced: firstly, the degree of satisfaction from the amount of contact the student with LFA had with other typical students and secondly, the degree of satisfaction from the amount of inclusion in the community. The implications of these findings for school programming, which specifically addresses mainstreaming issues with low functioning students with autism, and the importance of inclusion in the community are discussed.

**Keywords:** autism, inclusion, out of home placement, low functioning

## Sense of stress burnout and social support among staff members at residential schools

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The article focuses on residential group homes for children and youth at risk as highly pressured work environments. Such environments are likely to cause feelings of burnout in their employees, thereby endangering their health and welfare. Work in residential group care also involves daily interdisciplinary contact. Such staff interaction formed the background of a study on the contribution of mutual staff support for residential group care staff members and the relationship between burnout and colleague support. The research was carried out among 366 staff members working in residential group homes for children and youth at risk through questionnaires examining colleague support and burnout. Results show that feelings of environmental pressure at work accelerate the development of burnout in workers. Furthermore, satisfaction from colleague support was found to be the most significant in reducing burnout, rather than simply the existence of such support or the number of supporters. The findings demonstrate that in highly pressured work environments, and specifically in residential group homes for children and youth at risk, the development and encouragement of mutual support among colleagues can contribute to the quality of professional service offered and to the welfare of the workers.

**Keywords:** sense of stress, children at risk, burnout social support, residential school

## The unresolved dilemma regarding the professional training needed for practicing residential educators in educational, rehabilitative and treatment oriented residential settings

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The level of training required for residential educators in Israel, to be authorized to work with children and youth in care, has been under endless discussion for a long time. This phenomenon is true both for residential programs of the educational type, under the supervision of Ministry of Education, and residential settings of the rehabilitative and treatment oriented type, under the responsibility of Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. Israel is known to have a very large and varied network of residential programs. However, the advancement of the training of residential educators is far below the developments in many countries, especially most European countries. Many countries already in the 1960's opted for professionalization of these occupations and require employees who work directly with children to undergo long term professional education and licensing before undertaking their position. However in Israel the controversy concerning such professionalization has yet to be solved.

Throughout the paper we refer to several position papers from different countries including Israel. All of them call very firmly to expose children in residential care only to direct care workers who have completed a long term professional education. The paper also refers to a unique academic training program in Israel, where residential educators study two days a week at Beit Berl Academic College, while working as residential educators the other days of the week. This practical experience is credited and at the end of the program the participants receive a B.Ed. degree in informal education. Although this is the only example of real professionalization in Israel to date, it proves that a change in policy is possible.

Both Ministries, the Ministry for Social Affairs and Social Services and the Ministry of Education, differ in many respects in their policies regarding residential care. However, concerning the issue of professionalization of direct residential care workers seemingly neither is ready to take an unequivocal decision and assume its full implications.

**Keywords:** residential education, residential educators, training, professionalism, licensing

## The experience of transition to independent living of care leavers in Israel

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The study examines the experiences of care leavers during their immediate transition period from care to independent living. Many studies have examined care leavers' status several years after the transition, but very few have focused on their own personal experiences during this period, despite the important influence they might have on their future adjustment. Questionnaires administered to 236 participants were analyzed in regard to care leavers' positive and negative experiences as well as to their social support during the transition. Results show that the transition to independent living was accompanied by many difficulties but by positive experiences as well. A third of the care leavers reported that they had support only sometimes or not at all during the transition and that the transition period was difficult or very difficult. One of the conclusions in the study is that care leavers need to cope simultaneously with the transition and with the adjustment to the new primary occupation while some have to deal with financial difficulties, parents' relationships and loneliness as well. Discussion focuses on the need for preliminary evaluation and planning that take into account the care leavers' needs during this sensitive period in order to design appropriate programs that will help them gradually adjust to independent living.

**Keywords:** care leavers, independent living experiences, social support

## "I tell myself, how lucky I am that I ended up at this boarding school...": Therapeutic boarding school from the graduates' perspective

**Chen Mike**, MA, Clinical Psychologist

Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, children boarding environments placed great emphasis on maintaining order and discipline through adult control. As psychological thinking grew, it became clearer that the boarding environment itself has real potential of serving as a therapeutic function.



This article examines the concept of therapeutic boarding from the graduates' perspective, by means of the narrative interview method. For this research, life stories of four boarding school graduates were analyzed, resulting in 75 statements concerning the boarding environment. After a comprehensive content analysis, the statements were divided into two major themes. One comprised statements dealing with the place the boarding school took in the graduate's life story: the circumstances of leaving home, comparison between home and the boarding school and thoughts about what would have happened without the boarding school. The second included statements relating to daily life at the boarding school: relationships with the counselors, borders and boundaries of the boarding environment and relationships with peers. The life stories and their analysis enable a broader understanding of the boarding environment from the graduates' point of view.

**Keywords:** boarding school, life stories, narrative research

## Educational achievements of children and youth in out of home placements and in community child welfare treatment

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Multiple studies indicate that the life achievements of alumni of the child welfare system, and especially of children and youth who have been in out of home placements, are very troublesome. Educational outcomes are especially low- whereby a relatively large proportion of children in care drop out of school early, do not meet age appropriate educational achievements, and only a few advance to higher education. The aim of this paper is to describe the educational situation of children in care, both in the community and in out of home care, as well as children placed in out of the home educational residential settings ('youth villages').

The study is based on a secondary analysis of administrative national databases that were integrated for the purpose of the present study. The study examined an entire cohort of children born in 1989 (i.e., who were 19 years old in 2008). Due to major differences in placement patterns between Jews and Arabs, the study focuses on Jewish children, totaling 93,213 children.

We examined the educational achievements of the cohort in eighth grade. The findings indicate that they were already behind in their academic achievements. These educational gaps were also large as they grew older, and in comparison to their cohort peers they dropped out more and were more frequently engaged in interventions due to their behavioral problems. Overall, children and youth under the treatment of the Youth Authority (associated with juvenile delinquency) was the worst, compared with other out of home settings. The situation of youth in foster care was less severe than those in residential care, but was still considerably worse than their cohort peers. The number of those who took matriculation exams was very low among children in care, and of them a small proportion attained achievements that would render them eligible to enter higher education frameworks.

In the discussion the findings are compared with those of studies across the world. The authors present a series of recommendations to improve educational achievements among child welfare recipients. Changes in this area have the potential to bring about positive outcomes in multiple areas in the lives of care leavers.

**Keywords:** out of home care, foster care, residential care, child welfare, education