

Sustainable Care for Young People with Care Experiences - The Right to be Cared For : An Ethic of Care Approach to Better Understand How Youth with Substitute Care Experiences Wish to Be Cared for During their Interactions with Counsellors

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BACKGROUND: Placement in substitute care is most often involuntary. In this context, the counsellors' mandate generally involves balancing control and care practices. Control practices may sometimes take precedence over care practices, which can lead to a sense of confusion and ambivalence among youth, who feel they are being punished rather than protected. In this regard, an ethic of care approach could help reduce the imbalance between care and control practices by building on a set of ethical principles around interactions between caregivers and young people. However, studies have mostly documented the challenges posed by the reconciliation of these practices instead of exploring how they can contribute to the way youth are cared for. Many now also emphasized the importance to explore youth's perspectives in order to understand what they consider to be helping or having helped. Young people's perspectives can help better understand how to provide effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, as stated by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>).

OBJECTIVE: This study aims to describe the perceptions that adjudicated youth have of their interactions with the counsellors they engage with during their substitute care experiences.

METHODS: Semi-directed interviews were conducted with 20 adjudicated youth with care experiences aged 16-33. The majority of the participants were male (n=18). Most were placed in a residential care setting (85%), foster families (55%) or group homes (15%). A secondary thematic analysis of the data was conducted to describe youth's perceptions regarding their interactions with caregivers. An ethic of care approach (Tronto, 1993, 2013) was mobilized during the data analysis and interpretation process.

FINDINGS: Youth discussed how some interactions with their counsellors could promote trust and responsiveness. These interactions involved counsellors who were described as genuinely concerned about them and invested in their well-being. Youth also discussed

that supervision measures could be accepted when accompanied with benevolence on the part of their counsellors. This meant that rules and consequences needed to be clear and predictable, while being applied with honesty, transparency and flexibility. Finally, youth discussed how some interactions with their counsellors could provoke resistance. Those were deemed inconsistent with regards to the application of rules and measures, as well as unfair or too harsh.

CONCLUSIONS : Given that youth's legal and social status changes as they become adults, an ethic of care approach is a promising way to foster reciprocity and interdependence with their counsellors before they leave care. This is an important issue considering that youth tend to value self-sufficiency and perceive support seeking as a form of dependence on others when they age out of care. The integration of an ethical dimension into the way youth are cared for can give them more agency in their interactions with their counsellors. On the one hand, this gives them the opportunity to be listened to and heard. On the other hand, this allows them to be considered "experts" capable of playing a part in the intervention strategies intended for them and in the decisions that concern them.

BIOGRAPHY

Laurence Magnan-Tremblay is a Ph.D student at the University of Sherbrooke. Her dissertation seeks to understand how careleavers cope with the challenges during their transition into adulthood.

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