

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PEOPLE WHO GREW UP IN CHILDREN'S HOMES – DOES EDUCATION PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE?

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Abstract

This paper presents partial results from a retrospective study on factors that positively affect the employability of young adults who grew up in children's homes in the Czech Republic. The presented results focus on the impact of education on the number of employment opportunities which young adults were offered, their ability to take advantage of those opportunities and successfully adapt to labour market. The research was qualitative. With the use of semi-structured questionnaires, 15 respondents who left children's homes 10 or more years ago were interviewed about their personal history, growing up in the children's home, formal and informal education, and employment history. The responses were analysed through the content analysis and led to the following hypotheses: 1) respondents with vocational training have better access to employment opportunities after finishing their studies, and 2) respondents with a more positive attitude towards education reach a higher education level. These hypotheses will be further tested on a sample of approx. 400 respondents, who will be addressed by questionnaires. This paper discusses the partial results, the forthcoming quantitative analysis, and possible consequences of the research.

Keywords: employability, education, children's homes, retrospective study.

1 INTRODUCTION

Young people who grew up in public care institutions leave care at an earlier age than young people in the wider population tend to leave their home, according to studies, see [1], [2], the vast majority of them has to take care of themselves at or before reaching 18 years of age. Whether the transition to adult life of looked-after young people (LAYP) is successful or not depends on a combination and interaction of multiple contributing factors such as parenting experiences from their earliest life, their experiences of being looked after in the public care, the range of their social, practical and educational skills, the support they have received, and challenges they face in the current life situation. Broader social forces that help structure transitions for young people in the society are another factor of importance. In addition to leaving early, a number of life changing and stressful situations such as finding a new home and learning how to manage it, finding a stable work and starting a family is usually compressed into first years soon after leaving the public care (see [2], [3], [4]).

When it comes to the current life situation, LAYP have to face a vast variety of problems, especially academic qualifications, employment and financial instability, housing problems, building sustainable professional and intimate relationships, or having access to health care (see [2], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11]). This is typical picture of life of LAYP after leaving the institutional care painted across literature from various cultures and leads to a variety of deeper economical, psychological and social issues. In the Czech Republic, poor educational attainment and economic participation of LAYP are often mentioned in news and create a public picture of these people. Part of the problem is that many children enter the public care at the age of 7 or more and already have considerable educational deficits, but the public care often fails to adequately compensate this. Studies have shown that LAYP are three times more likely to perform unsatisfactorily at school and one third of them receives no training after basic education or gain access to vocational training (see [12], [13], [14]). This lack of education directly results in less employment possibilities or lesser ability to take up these possibilities (e.g. [15], [16]). As much as half of care leavers without formal qualifications ends up unemployed several months after leaving care (see [9], [17]), in another study [18], over two-fifths of respondents were unemployed 12–15 months after leaving care and just under one quarter were engaged in full-time or part-time education. A further 8% of young people were caring for a child. Education and economic stability are associated with social integration and inclusion of LAYP, which has a high

importance for marginalized or economically vulnerable populations, that create between 30 to 60 % of children in public care. This is related to a bigger societal problem – stereotyping of the LAYP public image. There is considerable evidence that LAYP tend to be disadvantaged when trying to find employment and experience less employment and lower earnings compared to their peers not in care (see [9], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], [26]). This may further hinder LAYP life and work situation, as various studies suggest the positive value of the first work experiences in care leavers' future employment (see [21], [27], [28]).

In the Czech Republic, there is the shortage of data on children LAYP, though the Czech Statistical Office publishes the number of children living in children's homes, their age, the percentage of boys and girls, and education level. What is missing is the information about what happens next to those who left, how they integrate into society and what factors influence it. According to Mimo Domov [29], more than a half of LAYP in the Czech Republic are struggling with finding housing and financial stability. Every year about 70 % of young people reaching adulthood in children's homes experience a variety of difficulties when entering the adult life. Because of current policy, there is no complete assistance with housing, enrollment at the relevant authorities, job search and further studies. Due to the large number of cases, social workers do not have time to work with young people. The same reasons made it impossible to accompany LAYP in the first months or years of their adulthood, though a worker that would accompany the young after leaving the children's home and advise them on how to proceed in various life situation would be very helpful addition to current practices. This is supported by the latest research conducted by the Tereza Maxová Foundation [30], that proposes to modify legislation, improve children's attitudes by psychological and therapeutic support, and assign less children to one educator.

This paper presents partial results from a retrospective study on factors that positively affect the employability of young adults who grew up in children's homes across the Czech Republic. The four years long project was approved by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic in November 2018 and its general goal is to analyse factors and their combinations which influence integration of LAYP into society and their adaptation on labour market. The presented results focus on the impact of education on the employment opportunities which young adults were offered, their ability to take advantage of those opportunities and successfully adapt to labour market. As previously stated by various studies (e.g. [31], [32], [33], [34], [35]), two main concepts are related to finding work as a young person— social capital and agency. Young person's social capital is explained by the number of various connections they have made in the course of their lives. It is important to state that the number is more impactful than the intensity of these contacts, since even weak social connections may be powerful in helping people find work. Personal agency is a concept related to the willingness or readiness to take up occurring job opportunities.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study had qualitative design using semi-structured interviews. The total number of 15 respondents (9 females, 6 males) who left children's homes 10 or more years ago were interviewed by trained interviewers. The semi-structured interview was based on the literature analysis and an expert' panel. The main thematic areas were the life situation when boarding the children's home, the course of stay in the home, the situation after leaving the home, the current life situation, the support used after leaving the home, and protective factors when leaving the home (see Table 1 below for the list of thematic areas and examples of questions).

Analysis of interviews was focused on education, previous and current job experiences and supplemental information important for the goals of the study. Other information obtained during interviews, that was not centred around the topic of this study, was or will be used in other parts of the beforementioned research.

Data from the interviews were processed using the IBM SPSS v25 and Atlas.ti v7.5.18 statistical software.

Table 1. Semi-structured interview thematic areas.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Questions set 1</i>	<i>Questions set 2</i>	<i>Questions set 3</i>
General information / Boarding the children's home	What's your age? When did you leave the children's home? How long were you living in the children's home?	What's your education? What's your work history?	How did you get to the children's home?
Current life situation	Could you describe your current family situation? Could you describe your current friendships?	What's your current job?	How do you feel about your current life situation? What's your self-realization?
Situation after leaving the children's home	Were you seeing your family? Did you have a partner? Did you have friends outside of the children's home?	When did you start going to work? What was your first job after leaving the children's home?	What were your housing conditions at that time? Were you seeing people from the children's home?
The course of stay in the home	Do you remember your first years in the children's homes? Were you seeing your family?	How did you get on with other children and with the employees in the children's home?	How was the school? How did you spend your free time?
The support used after leaving the home	Housing Financial support Material support	Counselling Mentoring Support during the years in the children's home	Job search assistance Job offering
Protective factors when leaving the home	Personality traits New start (leaving the city/country) The length of stay at the children's home The age of boarding the children's home	Education Work Formal support	Social support (family, friends, people from the children's home, people from the work) Emotional support

3 RESULTS

Table 2 below shows an example of general information about education, previous and current job experiences of the respondents. As seen, the most frequent education path was vocational training for waiter/waitress, followed by other types of vocational training in manual work preparing students to become craftsmen, masons etc. Three respondents reached elementary education and then decided to not follow with secondary education due to insufficient results in school in one case and due to problems with law in other two cases. The highest educational level was reached by one respondent, who finished higher education with chirurgical specialization and then also followed up with courses in mentoring and couching.

Table 2. General information about respondents.

<i>Case</i>	<i>M/F</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Age when boarding the public care</i>	<i>Years spent in the public care</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>First job</i>	<i>Current job</i>
1	M	27	14	4	Primary	Manual	Disability pension
2	M	29	5	13	Vocational - mason	Shop assistant	Messenger
3	M	31	12	6	Vocational - electrician	Manual	Self employed
4	M	35	7	12	Vocational - craft	Joiner	Manager
5	F	27	13,5	4,5	Vocational - waitress	non	Maternity leave
6	F	33	3	16	Vocational - waitress	Waitress	Manager

7	F	36	2,5	15,5	Vocational - cook	Cook	Manager
8	F	38	4	15	Vocational - waitress	Waitress	Maternity leave
9	F	44	3	15	Higher - chirurgic	Nurse	Mentoring
10	F	55	3	15	Vocational - trade	Shop assistant	Disability pension
11	M	41	3	15	Vocational - craft	Manual	Self employed
12	M	33	9	12	Primary	Manual	Driver
13	F	28	8	10	Vocational - waitress	Shop assistant	Manager
14	F	30	15	4	Vocational - waitress	Baker, waitress	Maternity leave
15	F	36	7	8	Primary	Shop assistant	Shop assistant

While majority of respondents entered the public care between the age of 3 and 7, there were also four exceptions who left their primary families at 12 or more years of age. All respondents left the public care between the age of 18 and 19, with motivation to find work and become financially stable, except for one respondent who moved in with her partner and started their own family. Five respondents had no job at the time of the interview, three of them being on a maternity leave and two in disability pension. Two respondents became self employed soon after starting their career. All the respondents explained they were satisfied with their educational and career choices, except for those with primary education only and one respondent who chose her education based on the recommendation received from her teacher (vocational training in trade) and not on her actual hobby (dressmaking).

Analysis of information obtained during the interviews revealed following relations:

- 1 People with primary education work/ed mostly in manual jobs and changed work more often.
- 2 People with vocational training for waiter/cook had least struggles in finding their first job.
- 3 People who chose education field based on their hobbies finished their studies and work in the field of studies more often.
- 4 There was a significant correlation between the years spent in public care and the length of first job ($p < 0.001$) and of current job ($p < 0.05$) with people spending more years in public care having longer first and current job experiences.
- 5 Significant correlation between the age of entering the public care and the number of jobs was found ($p < 0.001$); people entering the public care earlier changed their job less often.

3.1 Hypotheses

Based on the results of the statistical analysis and content analysis, the responses from the conducted interviews led to stating the following hypotheses, that will be further tested in a consequent study with approximately 400 respondents: 1) respondents with vocational training have better access to employment opportunities after finishing their studies, and 2) respondents with a more positive attitude towards education reach a higher education level.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The beforementioned interviews were followed up with 25 others, which are currently under statistical and content analysis to obtain more information and find support for the results we have found so far. They will also help us choose proper diagnostical battery to use in forthcoming stages of the research. The complete qualitative analysis of interviews and the forthcoming quantitative study, that will be held in 2020 and 2021, are two main steps of the project approved by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic and will help us suggest improvements in programs for LAYP and for children entering and living in public care. Final goal is to make subtle or broader changes in the current policy and make the integration into society and adaption onto the labour market of LAYP easier and more effective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is supported by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, project n. TL02000217.

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