

Growing Up in State Care: Care Leavers Perspectives on Mental Health, Suicide, and Help- Seeking in Latvia

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Abstract

Historically, the child welfare system in Latvia has been dominated by institutional care, but little is known about the mental health needs of the youth living in these institutions or upon leaving state care. This descriptive survey study explores the perspectives of adults (N=44) who grew up in state care in Latvia on the mental health experiences and needs of this group. Many believed that depression (65.9%), suicidal thoughts (45.5%), and suicide attempts (29.6%) were common in state care. Many reported personal experiences with depression, suicidal thoughts, and attempts in care (69.2%, 48.7%, and 23.1%, respectively) and after leaving care (69.4%, 43.6%, and 16.7%, respectively). Self-reported lifetime suicidal ideation was 48.7% and attempts were 28.2%). Some believed that there was support in care for youth who have suicidal thoughts (28.2%) and make attempts (43.6%) and after they leave care (28.2%) and (30.8%). Help-seeking intentions were low, with participants much more likely to seek help from a partner (59%) or friend (43.6%) than a mental health professional (33.3%), parent (23.1%), doctor (12.8%), or minister (15.4%), if needed for a personal problem or mental health challenge. Implications of these findings for group homes, foster parents, and adoptive parents will be discussed.

Keywords: Child Welfare; Institutional care; Latvia; Mental Health; Suicide