

Title: *Relationships on Residential Care* - Quality of care and perceptions of Warmth/Rejection of children in residential care

Residential care remains one of the essential measures for the protection of children and adolescents. This study is part of a larger project examining the quality of care and development of children in residential care. This research analyses the relationship between the warmth or rejection perceived by children from their caregivers and the quality of care. It also analyses whether there are differences in the warmth or rejection perceived depending on the number of young people residing in the care home (≤ 8 places vs. 20 places). A total of 101 children/adolescents between 9 and 16 years of age and 94 caregivers from 16 protection homes in the province of Malaga (Spain) participated in the study. An ad hoc instrument named EQUAR-Andalucía based on the EQUAR quality standards was created and used to assess the quality of care. Specifically, standards 13 ('Normalization and Integration') and 14 ('Development and Autonomy') of the children's version and standard 21 ('Affective and Emotional Needs') of the caregiver's version were used. In addition, children completed the Affect Scale comprising two factors ('Warmth/Communication' and 'Criticism/Rejection') to assess their perception of the affective relationship with their caregivers. Statistically significant positive correlations were observed between the perception of Warmth/Communication and the standards of Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy, and with the 'Affective and Emotional Needs' perceived by the caregivers. Whereas the correlations between Criticism/Rejection and these standards followed the opposite pattern. Furthermore, it was found that in homes with fewer children (≤ 8 places), they perceived less Warmth/Communication and more Criticism/Rejection than in larger homes (20 places). Finally, we studied whether the Warmth or Rejection that the children perceived from their caregivers could be explained by the quality of care, finding that Normalisation and Integration explained 62.7% of the Warmth/Communication and 36.5% of the Criticism/Rejection perceived. Among the results found, it is remarkable and unexpected, that children perceive more Warmth and less Rejection in homes with more children residing (20 places) than in smaller homes (≤ 8 places). These results require further research to analyse other possible factors underlying the relationships found and to contribute to their interpretation (e.g. material and human resources, organisation, leadership, etc.). It is also relevant that two of the standards studied (Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy) explain a large percentage of

the children's perception of Warmth and Rejection. These results highlight the importance of meeting the indicators on Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy (i.e. that children feel at home in the facility, feel integrated in the community and are autonomous) to provide high quality care, since then children perceive greater Warmth and less Rejection from their caregivers.

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