

A Comparative and Mixed Methods Study of Possible Selves of Adolescent Boys in an Observation Home and a Children's Home in India

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Abstract : The aim of this research was to study and compare the nature of expected, feared and hoped-for selves in institutionalized adolescent boys in two residential settings - an observation home with children in conflict with the law, and a children's home with children in need of care and protection. The study uses a concurrent mixed methods design, in which eight adolescent boys from each group, aged 13-17, were asked to respond to a questionnaire, followed by an in-depth interview. The questionnaire looked into the total scores on current, probable and hoped-for/feared positive and negative self-descriptors. Possible selves of both groups were found to be influenced by their unique histories, such as with their experience of violence, interaction with the police and emphasis given on education. Expected selves and hoped-for selves were similar within the two groups. However, they were more concrete and attainable in the observation home and more ambitious in the children's home. Quantitative results showed that on the positive self-descriptors, the participants in the observation home had a slightly lower total score on the current parameter as on the probable and hoped-for parameters. The participants in the children's home showed similar results on current and probable positive self-descriptors, with higher scores on the hoped-for parameter. For most of the negative self-descriptors, the current score for the observation home group was lower than the expected score, and for the children's home group, they were feared slightly more than they were expected. Along with the nature of possible selves, the study also looked into threats and support to desired and feared possible selves, as well as strategies to attain the desired possible selves and avoid feared possible selves. While threats to possible selves were identified as external and internal in both groups, the participants in the children's home tended to identify threats as external. The categories of support were similar across the two groups, although the nature of support provided differed. Strategies adopted by participants in the observation home could be clearly divided as past, present and future strategies, while those adopted by participants in the children's home had an overlap with past and future strategies. The institution was perceived as having a negative influence for the future in the observation home group, but positive in the children's home group. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research, policy setting and the counselling profession are discussed.

Keywords : adolescents, expected self, feared self, hoped-for self, institutions, possible selves

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