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The Relationship between Adolescent's Free Verses Enforced Decision to Enroll in an out-of- Home Boarding School and Later Well-being

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Abstract: Boarding schools are the common 'out-of-home' placements for adolescents, due to various historical, religiously orthodox, and traditional reasons and due to dysfunction within families. The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between a free versus an enforced decision to enroll in a boarding school in terms of personal well-being among emancipated graduates. Ninety alumni graduates (aged range 20-41) of out-of-home boarding schools in Israel were recruited during 2019. Participants were administered a self-report anonymous questionnaire consisting of the following measures: Free versus enforced decision to enroll in a boarding school, retrospective satisfaction with the boarding school, personal well-being and traumatic events. Results indicated that a free decision to enroll in an out-of-home boarding school was associated with current satisfaction with social relationships but not with quality of life. Additionally, the longer the period spent in a boarding school, the higher was the satisfaction from the period at school. Older graduates reported less satisfaction from school retrospectively. It was concluded that involving the adolescent in life changing decisions such as leaving home to a boarding school is likely to influence the person's well-being during and after emancipation.

Keywords: *Boarding school, out-of-home placements, decision-making, well-being.*

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Introduction

Almost 10% of Israeli adolescents grow up in youth villages (Azulay et al., 2010). Israel is unique in its use of boarding schools (also called youth villages) to educate, house, and raise refugee youth arriving in Israel without parents or from impoverished, immigrant, or struggling families. This unique out-of-home placement has changed and evolved.

A half-century ago, adolescents in youth villages were from mostly impoverished refugee families. In more recent years, the adolescents coming to youth villages face different challenges in addition to poverty and being new immigrants; they often are from single-parent families or have parents with mental health or substance abuse problems. Thus, out-of-home placements become an option when the adolescents' home environments become problematic and unstable due to situations such as families' lack of resources or domestic violence.

Adolescence marks a unique phase of development of self-identity, future orientation, and healthy habits, many of which continue throughout the life course (Blum et al., 2012; Catalano et al., 2012; Martinson & Vasunilashorn, 2016). Studies signify that many adults ages 18 to 25 who were in out-of-home placements during childhood encounter complex health and mental weaknesses throughout their lives (Martinson & Vasunilashorn, 2016). This suggests the following questions: Did the out-of-home placements attenuate or augment the childhood trauma that necessitated the placement, or may it have made no difference at all? Furthermore, which features of the out-of-home placement, if any,

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had either a positive or negative impact? Few studies have focused on these questions. As noted by a rare international study assessing childhood out-of-home placements in seven countries (including Israel), attention must be paid to the process of placement including all the events preceding, during, and after placement; and the placement's fit for the youth's temperament (Harder et al., 2011). Harder et al. (2011) emphasized that it was not just the placement's features that influenced the adolescent, but also the context and the circumstances that led to transferring into a boarding school. For example, Mander et al. (2015) who explored the experiences of Aboriginal male students from remote regions in a metropolitan boarding school, reported that decision making (choice-less choice, and opportunity), the organizational climate within the school including the level of the cultural shock, and the change in the family former friends dynamics influenced the boarder student' well-being. However, few studies focused on the meaning of this transition in regards to the adolescent's free or enforced choice to leave home. Assuming that adolescence is a period of experiencing decision making (Dahl, 2004; Pfeifer & Peake, 2012; Steinberg & Sheffield-Morris, 2001) and taking into consideration the significance of leaving home for the child, the current study examines the impact of free versus enforced decision to leave home on several factors. It explores whether the out-of-home boarding schools' features were perceived as beneficial for individuals arriving at them with particular life experiences (i.e., adverse childhood events, family situations, and adopted community norms). In addition, this study assesses the extent that a free versus an enforced decision to enroll to in a boarding school influenced later adulthood social relationships and quality of life.

Literature Review

Out of home placement system in Israel

There are two main types of boarding schools in Israel: (a) Protective Custody under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare, where a therapeutic approach is emphasized, and (b) Educational boarding schools (for example, youth villages) that are supervised by the Ministry of Education and which have more of an educational focus (Dinisman & Zeira, 2014). Boarding schools are a more common assignment for out-of-home placement than foster care; about 80% of all out-of-home placement services are under boarding schools.

There is a difference in the characteristics of the applicant population of adolescents referred to each boarding school type mentioned above. The Ministry of Education's Youth villages since the 1950s stood as a means for cultural integration and invited youth from the agricultural settlements alongside the children coming from weakened socio-economic backgrounds. Most children in these educational institutions were referred by their families who sought to provide their children with better resources for advancement in Israeli society. In recent years, there has been a change in the social mix of these institutions; the proportion of youth coming from a background of socio-economic difficulties has risen. Along with immigrants/refugees, populations from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia (Benbenishty & Zeira, 2008), some of the educational boarding schools also include pupils referred by the Ministry of Welfare (Dinisman & Zeira, 2014).

In addition, under the Ministry of Education, the state provides two religious boarding schools: Yeshiva – a school for boys and Olpana – a boarding school for girls. Forty-three percent (43%) of the religious Israeli Jewish girls and 50% of the Israeli Jewish boys ages 13-18 are residing in these institutions (Khoury, 2013). Most of these schools are not aimed at vulnerable or disadvantaged populations, but rather at the entire national religious community. The placing of many of the young people from the religious community to study and be educated in boarding schools represents the social culture and beliefs that exist in the society in which they grew up. These religious boarding schools are considered the "flagship" of state religious education. They are considered a 'high class' status symbol and are generally elitist in orientation and selective (Khoury, 2013). They incorporate an advanced educational level, clear conceptual guidance regarding social, cultural, and political ideology, and a supportive social climate (Taub, 2007; Yebelberg, 2013). Most parents who send their children to the religious boarding schools believe that their children will be educated with additional and meaningful values within this educational institution. For this population, the boarding school is an instrument for supervising adolescents at the crucial stage of building their self-identity. It creates protection against secularization and ensures unadulterated content and socialization (Taub, 2007).

In contrast, the boarding schools of the Welfare Ministry constitute an "educational safety net" for children and adolescents at-risk and often are offered to dysfunctional parents instead of forcing it by the judicial system. These boarding schools are targeted to youth, mostly born in the country, from socio-economically suppressed populations, often assessed by the social services to be low functioning families. On the whole, this group faces social and emotional challenges; some arrive from immigrant families (second generation) and face cultural challenges arising from the difficulties of integrating into the Israeli culture and way of life (Yebelberg, 2013), others from dysfunctional families (violence, abuse and neglect) (Dinisman & Zeira, 2014) or those who exhibit juvenile delinquency.

The implications of out of home boarding school placement on the graduates' well-being

Adolescence is a critical period for developing our sense of who we are, our values, beliefs, habits and aspirations. (Blum et al., 2012; Catalano et al., 2012). A stable home is fundamental to the realization of this developmental stage (Martinson & Vasunilashom, 2016). Nevertheless, in this period, the changes in the social-self also bring changes in

relationships with peers and family (Steinberg, 2011). Friendships become more intimate and supportive, and peers become more important in decision-making (Berndt, 1992; Larson et al., 1996). Living away from home at this stage cuts adolescents off dramatically from all the resource systems they have acquired through childhood and leaves them in need of creating new support systems during this sensitive and critical phase of inward self-identity formation. Mander and Lester (2017) who compared the well-being of boarding with non-boarding students at Grades 7-9, reported that at the beginning of Grade 8 and end of Grade 9, boarding students had significantly higher emotional symptoms than non-boarding students did. Studies examining adults ages 18 to 25 who were in out-of-home placements during adolescence found that the graduates had disproportionately high rates of psychological and physical problems throughout the life course (Pecora et al., 2012).

Studies indicated several common characteristics of men and women graduates from social services boarding schools, as manifested in their young adulthood (Benbenishty, 2015; Milkman, 2015; Yavelberg, 2013). Benbenishty (2015) found that they struggled to make decisions and become independent, as manifested in frequent changes of residence and occupation. Emancipated graduates also face difficulties when interacting with state institutions (Benbenishty & Schiff, 2009). Once youth leave the protective institution, they find themselves with a poor social network and little experience in being independent (Milkman, 2015). At the age of eighteen, having to move on, they tend to feel lonely and alone and lack a sense of belonging (Shimoni & Benbenishty, 2012). These feelings of loneliness, a sense of temporariness, and uncertainty among emancipated graduates were found to lead to a lack of self-control and being vulnerable to external control (Benbenishty, 2015). Others who compared out of home boarding school emancipated graduates with young adults who grew up at home found that the formers' academic achievements were less (Stein & Munro, 2008). They became parents at a younger age, were more involved in risk behaviors and crime (Yalvelberg, 2013), and had a higher level of mental, physical and societal problems and difficulties (Moreno-Cohen et al., 2012).

The implications of free versus enforced decision to enroll a boarding school

There is a consensus among clinicians that one of the characteristics of young people at risk is their feeling that they are not in control of their destiny and that stronger forces outside of themselves maneuver them (Benbenishty & Zeira, 2012). Studies found positive associations between adolescents' sense of control and their mental and physical health, self-esteem, life satisfaction and a positive future perspective (Benbenishty & Zeira, 2012; Caputo, 2003; Erol & Orth, 2011; Kerpelman & Mosher, 2009; Pinquart et al., 2004). Rap et al., (2019) examined the relationship between choice and lack of choice regarding a decision to leave home for a boarding school, and the quality of life and well-being of emancipated graduates. They found that 80% who were required by welfare authorities to leave home, reported that lack of information and disregard for their opinions and wishes affected their well-being during and after spending time at the boarding school. Other studies show that youth who participate in their life decisions learn reasoning skills in that way, and collaborate better with others (Collins, 2017; Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

The belief-disconfirmation paradigm focuses on people coping with cognitive dissonance; refers to a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors that produces a mental discomfort leading to an alteration in attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to restore balance. According to this paradigm, in a state of cognitive dissonance, instead of altering one's personal belief, a misperception or rejection of the information, leading the person to seek others who share his or her beliefs as well as continuous attempts to convert others to one's beliefs (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Harmon-Jones and Mills (2019) claimed that making a free decision strengthens the person's satisfaction from life. Students who feel that boarding school placement is imposed upon them might experience cognitive dissonance. Youngsters who feel forced into out-of-home placement might enter placement with a negative view of it and consequently might emotionally shut themselves off from the positive experiences they could have in these therapeutic, educational placements. Might they misperceive or reject new positive experiences and learning and null the potential richness of their new social and learning environment?

Methodology

Research Goal

The current study, sought to examine to what extent free versus enforced decisions to enroll in boarding schools, are associated with quality of life in emancipated graduates.

Sample and Data Collection

Following signing a consent form to participate in the study, 125 emancipated graduates of three boarding schools in Israel between the ages 19-41 ($M=22.6$, $SD=4.0$; 52.2% females, 46.7% males) were recruited through lists of former students (alumni). Electronic messages were sent offering to participate in the study. The final convenience sample included 90 participants, 69% were born in Israel and 88% were Jewish; 35 were dropped from the sample due to missing data. Regarding boarding school characteristics: 69 participants graduated educational youth villages, 16 graduated welfare boarding school, and 5 graduated religious boarding school. Length of residence at the boarding school ranges from 1 to 11 years ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.7$). Concerning lifetime history of abuse, 76% experienced a traumatic event; the most frequent traumatic events were: death of a family member (30%), parents' divorce (37%), and poverty

(37%) (see Table 1). Following signing a form of consent, a self-report anonymous online questionnaire, was administrated.

Table 1: Demographic descriptive statistics (N=90)

Variable	M (SD)	N (%)
Age of enrollment	14.7	(1.5)
Marital status (single)	81	(91%)
Religious orientation, n (%)		
. Secular	43	(48%)
. traditional	29	(32%)
. religious	18	(20%)
Occupation, n (%)		
. army workplace	25	(28%)
. academic studies	20	(22%)
. civilian workplace	32	(36%)
. other	13	(14%)
Place of living, n (%)		
. with parents	47	(52%)
. other	43	(48%)
Education level, n (%)		
. Above 12 years	35	(39%)
. High school	41	(46%)
. other	13	(15%)
Income, n (%)		
. below minimum	38	(63%)
. around minimum	11	(18%)
. above minimum	11	(18%)
Having children, n (%)	6	(7%)
Traumatic events, any event, n (%)	68	(76%)
Physical illness within the family, n (%)	20	(22%)
Mental illness within the family, n (%)	23	(26%)
Death of a family member, n (%)	27	(30%)
Family member's imprisonment, n (%)	12	(13%)
Parents' divorce, n (%)	33	(37%)
Alcoholism of family member, n (%)	16	(18%)
Poverty, n (%)	33	(37%)
Physical abuse, n (%)	16	(18%)
Sexual abuse, n (%)	18	(20%)
Natural or human-made disaster, n (%)	13	(14%)
Illness, n (%)	2	(2%)
Social peer rejection at boarding school, n (%)	5	(6%)
Sexual abuse at boarding school, n (%)	2	(2%)
Physical abuse at boarding school, n (%)	5	(6%)
Social rejection by peer at boarding school, n (%)	8	(9%)

Instruments

The self-report quantitative questionnaire included the following measures: demographics, extent of free versus enforced decision to enroll in the boarding school, parental involvement in the decision, retrospective satisfaction of the boarding school, history of trauma, social satisfaction and quality of life.

Demographics: Demographic questions included the following variables: age, religion, socio-economic status, education attainment level, place of work, characteristics of the boarding school, age of enrolment, and duration of placement at the boarding school.

Free versus enforced decision to enroll in the boarding school: Following organizing a meeting focusing on the motivations and reasons to enroll, with a group of adolescents at risk in one of the boarding school, the authors asked the following questions: Eight questions referred to the motivations and reasons to enroll in the boarding school, and six questions referred to the person who made the decision for the participant enrollment. Another two questions assessed the extent to which the decision to get out-of-home placement involved the participant (for example, "to what extent did you have a choice?") on a 5-point Likert-type response from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("extremely"). A high score

indicated a high level of self-decision making. Reliability of the current sample was found to be 0.90 Alpha Cronbach. Note, that this should not be considered as a measure but rather a group of questions that relates decision-making.

Parents' involvement in decision: One item measured the extent of parental involvement in the decision to enroll in the boarding school ("to what extent were your parents involved in the decision?") on a 5-point scale from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("extremely"). A high score indicate a high level of parental involvement.

Boarding school satisfaction questionnaire (Zeira & Benbenishty, 2008): The satisfaction from boarding school questionnaire was developed by the Israeli Forum for Boarding schools and is regularly used to assess specifically students' satisfaction in boarding schools. This measure includes nine items, which retrospectively assess the level of satisfaction with their period at the boarding school. The questionnaire refers to relationships with the staff; perceived contribution of the boarding school to participant's life (for example, "to what extent the boarding school contributed to your family relationships?"); extent of boarding school as a supportive place and lastly the ranking of overall experience. This questionnaire in our current sample was found to have a high reliability of Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.85$).

Traumatic events questionnaire: A shorter version of the Traumatic Events Screening Inventory for Children (Degenhardt et al., 2008; Ippen et al., 2002), was used as adapted by Milkman (2016) who conducted a similar study. In this shorter version, the 10 items focus on traumatic events experienced by young adults who resided in an out-of-home boarding school during adolescence. The aim of the instrument is to assess the extent of exposure to traumatic events. The adjusted questionnaire (Milkman, 2016) includes fifteen items (for example "did your parents get divorced?"; "were you a victim of non-sexual assault / physical abuse?"; "were you physically abused by peers while in boarding school?"). Participants were asked to indicate whether or not they experienced each event. The original tool on which the adapted questionnaire was based has been validated in numerous studies on adolescents in Israel and around the world (Milkman, 2016). Note, that method bias in this specific case is less likely when respondents are motivated to provide optimal responses to the questions and more likely to the extent that respondents are motivated to expend less effort by satisficing. The shorter version of the traumatic events measure is binary yes/no. thus less emotional and cognitive effort is needed in terms of event description of the event and emotional. Additionally, to the extent that respondents are interested in the study aims, they may be more likely to expend the effort required to generate an optimal answer, and the threat of method bias therefore, will be lowered (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Social satisfaction: The UCLA Loneliness Scale Revised (R-UCLA-LS) (Russell et al., 1980) assesses the level of a person's loneliness versus social satisfaction. The validated measure includes twenty items (for example, "I have no one to turn to"). For each item, participant indicates the extent of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("extremely"). Nine items (2,3,7,11,12,13,14,17,18) are reversed; a high score for each item indicates a higher social satisfaction level, while low score indicates a high level of loneliness. The scale was validated in a large number of studies across ages (e.g., Pozinovsky & Ritsner, 2004). In the current study high reliability of Alpha Cronbach ($\alpha=0.84$) was found.

Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) (Huebner, 1991): It contains seven items (for example "I have a good life") that assess the level of a person's life satisfaction. Participants were asked to indicate the level of agreement ranging from 1 ("never") to 4 ("almost always"). Two items were reversed (3 and 4). A high score indicates a higher level of life satisfaction. The measure was found valid in a large number of studies in Israel and worldwide across ages (e.g., Milkman, 2016). In the current study the reliability of Cronbach's Alpha was found to be $\alpha=0.81$

Analyzing of Data

Continuous variables were reported by mean and standard deviation. Frequencies and proportions reported categorical variables. Normal distributions of the outcome measures: retrospective satisfaction of boarding school placement, quality of life and social satisfaction were explored with previously described methods, including analyses of skewness and kurtosis (Kim, 2013). Satisfaction of boarding school placement was not normally distributed and therefore a rank transformation was performed on the ordered parameter's values. A rank transformation is a monotonic transformation of the variable.

The associations between ranked values of retrospective satisfaction from boarding school, quality of life (life satisfaction) and social satisfaction were evaluated by Pearson correlation coefficient. The internal consistency of each scale was determined by calculating Cronbach's Alpha.

To find the best subset of demographic parameters that significantly characterized high levels of the ranked retrospective satisfaction of boarding school placement, quality of life and social satisfaction, linear regressions with stepwise selection method were used. Specifically, two types of models were used: (1) Model 1 included all the following demographic variables as candidates for entering the final model as well as experiencing any traumatic event. Model 2 included the candidate variables as in model 1, but instead of experiencing any event, specific events were used. For the two models, the candidate variables to enter the final model were gender, age, free versus enforced decision, parents' involvement in decision, age of enrolling to boarding school, residing duration at boarding school, gender, level of religiousness, current occupation, place of living, and level of education. The specified traumatic event

candidates for model 2 were physical illness within the family, mental illness within the family, death of a family member, imprisonment of a family member, parents' divorce, alcoholism of a family member, poverty, physical abuse, sexual abuse, experiencing natural disaster, social peer rejection at the boarding school. The stepwise selection method had variable entering-model criteria of 15% significance level of the Wald chi-square and stay criteria of 5% significance level of the Wald chi-square. A p value of 0.05 was considered significant. Statistical analysis was performed by SAS for windows version 9.4

Findings

Scales description

Composite scores were created for each of the scales as described in the measures section. Table 2 presents the scales' descriptive statistics and between scales Pearson correlation coefficients. Free versus enforced decision has a fair positive correlation with parents' involvement in the decision and social satisfaction ($r = 0.24, 0.26$, respectively, $p < .05$). (It has poor non-significant positive correlations with quality of life and retrospective satisfaction from boarding school ($r = 0.16, 0.14$). Parents' involvement in the decision has no correlation with retrospective satisfaction of time in the boarding school (and has fair positive correlation with the quality of life and social satisfaction ($r = 0.23, 0.25$, respectively, $p < .05$). Retrospective satisfaction of boarding school experience has a medium significant positive correlation with quality of life ($r = 0.29, p < .01$) and social satisfaction ($r = 0.43, p < .001$). Quality of life has medium positive correlation with social satisfaction ($r = 0.40, p < .001$).

Table 2: Scales descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients between scales (N=90)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Free versus enforced decision	4.06	1.20				
2. Parents' involvement in decision	3.80	1.35	0.24*			
3. Retrospective satisfaction from boarding school ¹	4.59	0.59	0.14	0.00		
4. Life quality	2.99	0.58	0.16	0.23*	0.29**	
5. Social satisfaction	3.29	0.42	0.26*	0.25*	0.43***	0.40***

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

¹descriptive statistics represent the original variable, while the correlation coefficient was calculated on the ranked values.

Characterization of high levels of scales

Table 3 presents the linear regression coefficients of the variables predicting significantly high levels of the scales, as were chosen by the stepwise selection process of model type 1. No predictor was found to be significantly related to retrospective satisfaction from boarding school. Occupation army workplace compared to civilian workplace ($B=0.41, p < .01$) and academic studies compared to civilian workplace ($B=0.38, p < .05$) is related to high quality of life scale values. High extent of free decision score ($B=0.09, p < .05$) is related to higher social satisfaction values.

Table 3: Linear regression results for characterizing high scales values of models type 1.

	Dependent Variable		
	RS	LQ	SR
Age	-0.04** (0.02)		
Free vs. enforced decision	0.11* (0.05)		0.1* (0.1)
Residence duration in boarding	0.15*** (0.40)		
Army vs. civilian workplace		0.41** (0.15)	
Academic studies vs. civilian workplace		0.38* (0.16)	
Other vs. civilian workplace		0.16 (0.19)	
Constant	4.58*** (0.47)	2.76*** (0.1)	65.96*** (1.84)

Note: Linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$, two-tailed). RS: rank retrospective satisfaction from boarding school, LQ: quality of life, SR: social satisfaction.

Table 4 presents the linear regression coefficients of the variables predicting significantly high levels of the scales, as were chosen by the stepwise selection process of models type 2. History of social peer rejection during boarding school ($B=-18.30, p < .05$) is related to lower values of retrospective satisfaction from boarding school. Occupation in the army workplace compared to civilian workplace ($B=0.36, p < .05$) and academic studies compared to civilian workplace ($B=0.35, p < .05$) is related to high quality of life scale values. History of poverty is related to lower values of quality of life ($B=-0.27, p < .05$). High free versus enforcement decision score ($B=0.07, p < .05$) is related to high social satisfaction values. History of sexual abuse is related to low social satisfaction values ($B=-0.25, p < .05$).

Table 4: Linear regression results for characterizing high scales values of models type 2.

	Dependent Variable		
	RS	LQ	SR
Age	-0.05*** (0.01)		
Residence duration in boarding	0.12** (0.04)		
Free vs. enforcement decision			0.07* (0.04)
Sexual abuse			-0.25* (0.10)
Mental illness within the family	0.34** (0.13)		
Physical abuse	-0.37* (0.15)		
Social peer rejection at boarding school	-0.54** (0.19)		
Poverty		-0.27* (0.12)	
Army workplace vs. civilian workplace		0.36* (0.15)	
Academic studies vs. civilian workplace		0.35* (0.16)	
Other vs. civilian workplace		0.16 (0.18)	
Constant	5.34*** (0.47)	2.89*** (0.11)	65.96*** (1.84)

Note: Linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). RS: ranked retrospective satisfaction from boarding school, LQ: quality of life, SR: social satisfaction.

Discussion

Evidence shows that one of the characteristics of young people at risk is their feeling that they are not in control of their destiny and feel maneuvered by stronger forces outside of themselves (Benbenishty et al., 2012). Based on the latter, the aim of the current paper was to examine whether a free versus an enforced decision to enroll in an out-of-home boarding school influences current quality of life among emancipated graduates. The main results indicated that free decision to enroll was positively associated with current social relations satisfaction and satisfaction with the boarding school retrospectively. However, no association was found between free decision to enroll and quality of life.

The association found between free decision to enroll and social relations satisfaction seems to confirm the assumption that the belief in one's power to shape one's life contributes to self-assurance in the ability to mobilize forces and deal with various unexpected events (Hobfoll et al., 1995; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Thus, despite the fact that most adolescents in our study enrolled in boarding schools due to personal and familial difficulties, the belief that it was their decision rather than enforced upon them, likely strengthened their willingness to embrace this experience and overcome difficulties. This seems in line with Guenther et al. (2020) findings indicating that boarding students' readiness and positive views of the transition, contributed to their positive perception of this educational opportunity journey.

Surprisingly, the mean score given by the majority of the respondents on the issue of choice was very high. It may suggest that their wishes at the age of 11 when they were on average enrolled, were largely consistent with parent aspirations, or that this is the result of the preparation conducted by the social workers, implied according to the Ministry of Welfare policy. Nonetheless, it can be assumed therefore that free decision to enroll in a boarding school, plays a significant role in adolescents' bonding to school, positive social behaviors, and later satisfaction from social relations. Our findings are in line with the large array of studies showing that sense of control over one's life includes the ability to practice self-choice, and a sense of empowerment resulting from recognized self-abilities and control over resources (Collins, 2017; Saywitz et al., 2010; Schofield & Beek 2005).

However, youth are not always sufficiently included in the decision to enroll in boarding schools. Indeed, Rap et al. (2019), who focused on the relationship between lack of choice regarding a decision to leave home for a boarding school, and the mental well-being of young graduates, found that 80% of minors, placed by the welfare ministry in boarding schools, reported lack of information and disregard for their opinions and wishes.

Another possible explanation for the association between satisfaction from the period spent in boarding school and free decision to enroll can stem from the need to justify their decision by alleviating and minimizing the past difficulties and adopt beliefs that are in accordance with their decision to enroll (Coppin et al., 2010). One of the paradigms of the cognitive dissonance theory is "the belief-disconfirmation." It refers to the state in which the dissonance will not alter the person's belief but instead can cause a misperception or rejection of the information, leading the person to seek others who share his beliefs and to try to convert others to his belief (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). The belief-disconfirmation paradigm of dissonance theory may call into the question whether youngsters who were enforced into out-of-home placement, closed themselves off from the therapeutic and educational positive experiences they could have benefited from in the boarding schools (Collins, 2017; Fitzgerald et al., 2009). In contrast, it could be that allowing oneself to create and be involved in social relationships during school period strengthens social skills, which can continue practicing in adulthood (Fitzgerald et al., 2009). Additionally, those who believe it was their free decision, did not have a dissonance problem. They thought that they were involved in the decision making, and they were open to

taking in the positive social experiences that they had in the boarding schools. This served them in the long term because they are satisfied with their social relationships even when they find their lives lacking in other ways (Collins, 2017).

Contrary to previous studies showing an association between spending period in boarding school and quality of life (Hays et al., 1995) this study revealed the opposite. Kucuk and Gunay (2014), who compared boarders with daily students, reported that the life quality scores of the boarders were lower than that of the day students. According to them, the living conditions of the boarders played a key role in the students' life quality levels. In the case of the current study, it could be that the youth at risk who enrolled in the boarding schools in Israel, received better conditions compared to what they would have at home which in turn impacted their later life satisfaction.

Working in the army contributed the most to graduates' quality of life. How can this be explained? The transition from adolescence to adulthood represents a major developmental challenge that involves furthering the move towards independence from the family unit, establishing spousal relationships, pursuing career and personal finances. All these challenges require making new decisions on crucial issues. Since the army in Israel is considered to be a financially secured, socially regarded positive workplace, its contribution to the emancipated graduate quality of life is not surprising.

Conclusion

The study findings seem to strengthen the importance of involving children and adolescents in the decision to enroll in boarding schools. Indeed, according to article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to express their opinions in all decisions that affect them (Council of Europe, 2002). The amendment entered into force on 18 November 2002 when it had been accepted by a two-thirds majority of the States parties (128 out of 191). Based on previous findings indicating that parents' sharing decisions with a child balance between parental authority and the child independence; influencing developmental outcomes such as taking responsibility upon oneself and self-control (Lundberg et al., 2007), it is clear that the right of the child to be part of decision making, must be kept primarily in decisions that are taken in judicial and administrative proceedings.

Suggestions

We suggest to involve the child in the decision to enroll in a boarding school even in at risk situations; it is imperative for the child's ability to benefit socially during that period and after emancipation. Another suggestion is to further inquire into the decision procedure characteristics in order to help professionals understand why some adolescents are more successful than others are.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that reduce the findings generalizability: First, the relatively small unrepresentative sample size. Second, the uniqueness on one hand and variation of boarding schools in Israel on the other hand, as well as difference in size of the groups (religious versus welfare institutions) may impact the results' generalization; placing very different types of boarding schools and student bodies together requires analysis from a cultural-societal aspect. Thirdly and most importantly, it should be acknowledged that there are a variety of factors that can contribute to perceived satisfaction with boarding, social relations, and quality of life, that are likely to add to the complexity of boarding and its outcomes.

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