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Assessed young persons in secure units – trajectories in out-of-home care

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An analysis of Swedish young persons' trajectories in out-of-home care will be here be presented. The young persons concerned have, at the request of social service authorities, been assessed by a multi-professional team at secure accommodations. These assessments lead to recommendations for further interventions for the social service to decide about, recommendations expected to provide a more foreseeable and stable time in care. Research has shown that young persons in out-of-home care can encounter more complexity instead of desired stability and foreseeability. Strauss analytical concept "trajectory" has been used to analyse the characteristics of the social processes in which the young persons were involved. A trajectory is initiated when children and young persons are being subjected to interventions from child protection and it is formed by involved actors. The aim was to analyse a sequence of young persons' trajectories in out-of-home care in relation to the assessment. The sequence constitutes an assessment during an eight weeks placement at a secure unit and the two following years. The young persons' trajectories are analysed by the interaction of young persons and social workers; the central actors. The courses of events regarding stability and instability were connected to the analysis. Using a multi-method approach, young persons have been followed during the two-year-period. Interviews with 16 young persons and 16 social workers as well as surveys to social workers concerning 85 young persons were conducted.

The analysis displayed the specific characteristics of young persons' trajectories. The courses of events in the diverse trajectories also differed to some extent. The young persons rarely perceived the courses of events as comprehensible and the assessment did not constitute a definite marker for increased stability and foreseeability. The courses of events after the assessments included additional placement instability, new social workers and new assessments. This instability was often connected to the context of the care system. In conclusion, despite instability at group level the young persons' time in care was portrayed in unique and complex social processes. The result emphasise the importance for all professionals of paying attention to each young person's experiences.

Key words: institutional assessments, trajectories, young persons