

# Returning to the Family after Residential Care

## Changes in Young People's Well-being and their Assessment of the Transition

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# Introduction

- In out-of-home care, family reunification is usually considered a desired outcome in most child protection systems (Berrick et al., 2023), but research shows that there is a risk of reunification breakdown and re-entry into care (Davidson et al. 2019; Farmer/Wijedasa 2013)
- Large body of research on risk and protective factors related to reunification stability and re-entry into care (Davidson et al., 2019; Esposito et al., 2022; Fernandez & Lee, 2011)
- Safety, permanency, and child well-being as guiding principles and desired out-comes in child welfare (Rosanbalm et al., 2016)
- Returners face a risk of poor well-being (Lutman & Farmer, 2013) or lower well-being compared to young people who remain in care (Biehal et al., 2015; James et al., 2017)

# Purpose and Research Questions

Examination of the self-reported subjective well-being of young people returning to their families after residential care in German-speaking Switzerland

- How does the subjective well-being of young people change after they return to their families compared to before?
- Is there a difference in the development of subjective well-being between young people who return to their families and those who remain in the same residential care facility?
- Are there associations between returners' assessments of their transition and their well-being after returning?

# Research Design and Sample



## The Personal Life of Young People in Residential Care

- Research project by the FHNW and the OST
- Funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)
- Quantitative Panel Study with 3 waves
- Focus on social relationships, living situation and well-being of young people (12-17 years) in residential care
- Data collected with an online-based survey
- Wave 1 in 2022: 90 RC facilities in 15 cantons
- Wave 2 in 2023: 160 Transitions

### Sample Distribution

	wave 1	wave 2
	<i>n</i> = 559	<i>n</i> = 430
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	46.9%	49.1%
Male	49.9%	48.4%
Non-binary	3.2%	2.6%
<i>Age</i>	<i>M</i> = 14.9 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.50)	<i>M</i> = 15.8 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.53)

### Transitions (at wave 2)

	<i>n</i>	%
Return to the Family	79	49.4
Change of RC group or facility	62	38.8
Leaving Care to Independence	19	11.9

## Research Instruments – Subjective well-being

- Subjective well-being defined as life satisfaction with various life domains (Diener, 1984)
- Index developed based on the German questionnaire of the *International Survey of Children's Well-Being (ISCWeB)* (Rees, 2017)
- 16 items-Index: satisfaction with (a) the people respondents live with, (b) relationships with friends, (c) their family, (d) the way they are listened to by adults, (d) the places where they live, (f) school, (g) health, (h) possessions, (i) time management, (j) leisure, (k) safety, (l) future prospects, (m) self
- 10-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (very satisfied)
- mean score across all 16 items, allowing for up to two missing values

# Research Instruments – Assessment of the Transition

- Returning to the family is not a one-time event, but a challenging process of leaving care and reintegration into everyday family life (Bullock et al., 1998; Wulczyn, 2004)
- Different aspects of the transition process were measured
  - Overall assessment (coping well & having a difficult time)
  - Life after residential care (freedom, self-determination, loneliness, missing RC)
  - Transition process (willingness to leave RC, transition preparation, support from professionals)
- 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree)

# Subsample (*n* = 334)

	<i>Returned</i>	<i>Remained</i>
	<i>n</i> = 79	<i>n</i> = 255
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	50.6%	49.0%
Male	48.1%	48.6%
Non-binary	1.3%	2.4%
<i>Nationality</i>		
Swiss	69.6%	69.0%
Non-Swiss	26.5%	23.9%
Unkown	3.8%	7.1%
<i>Age at wave 2</i>	<i>M</i> = 16.2 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.37)	<i>M</i> = 15.5 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.52)
<i>Age at first out-of-home placement</i>	<i>M</i> = 12.2 years ( <i>SD</i> = 3.45)	<i>M</i> = 11.5 years ( <i>SD</i> = 4.27)

<i>Returners</i>	
Age on return	<i>M</i> = 15.6 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.18, Range: 13-18)
Time since return	<i>M</i> = 6.8 months ( <i>SD</i> = 4.05, Range: 0-14)
Length of stay in the last RC facility	<i>M</i> = 3.6 years ( <i>SD</i> = 1.82, Range: 0.7-9.8)
<i>Places of Return</i>	
Mother	44.3% ( <i>n</i> = 35)
Both Parents	32.9% ( <i>n</i> = 26)
Father	13.9% ( <i>n</i> = 11)
Mother & Father	3.8% ( <i>n</i> = 3)
Mother & Grandparents	3.8% ( <i>n</i> = 3)
Mother & Grandparents & other relatives	1.3% ( <i>n</i> = 1)

# Changes in Well-being

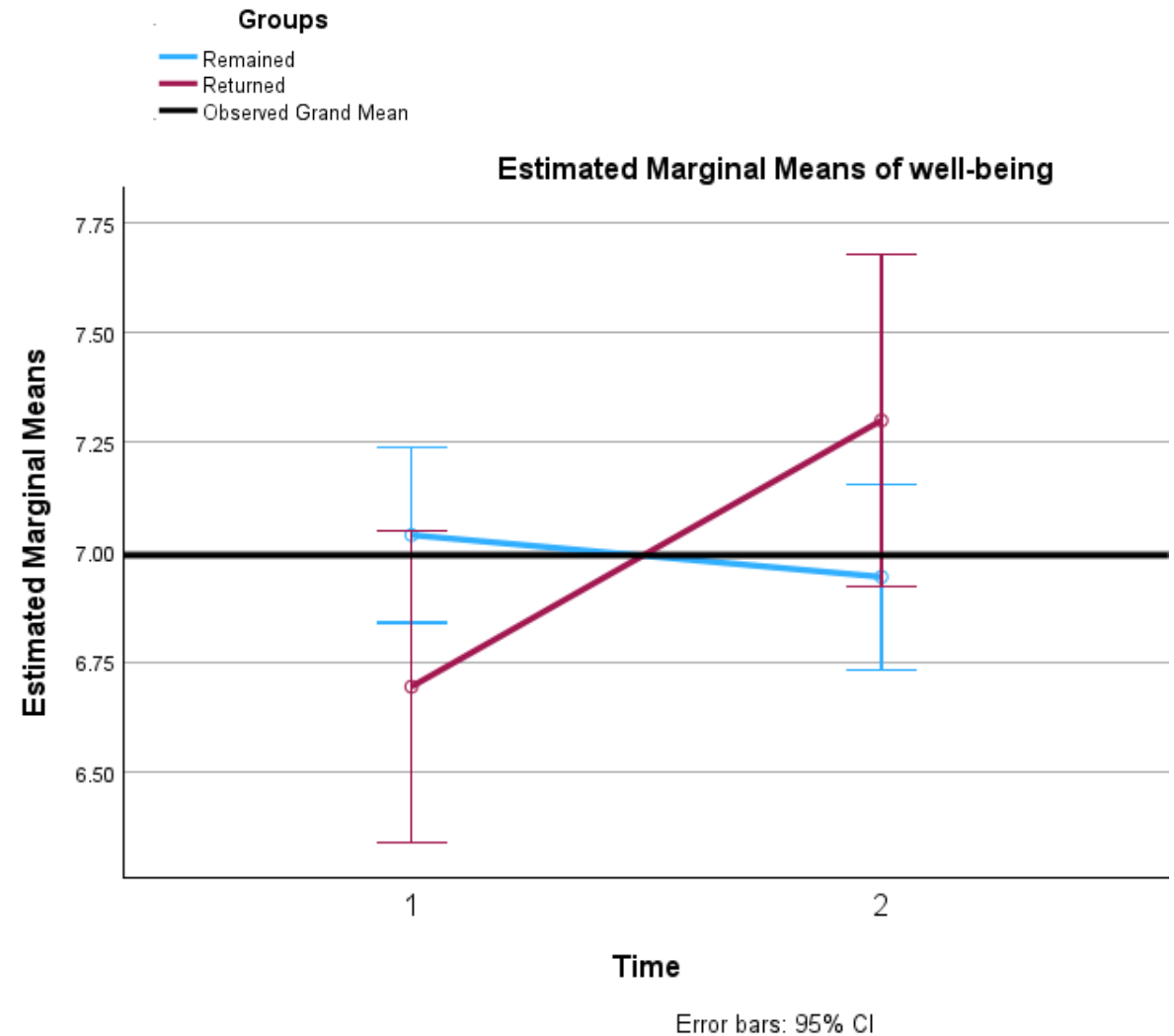
## Subjective well-being at t1 and t2

	Time	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Returned (n = 73)	1	6.693	.181	6.338	7.049
	2	7.300	.192	6.922	7.678
Remained (n = 232)	1	7.039	.101	6.839	7.238
	2	6.944	.108	6.732	7.156

Between-subjects factor (group)  $F(1, 303) = .001, p = .997$

Within-Subjects factor (time)  $F(1, 303) = 6.129, p = .014$

Interaction effect (time\*group)  $F(1, 303) = 11.542, p < .001$



# Returners' Assessment of the Transition

	(Rather) Disagree	Partially Agree	(Rather) Agree
<b>Overall Assessment</b>			
Coping well after RC ( $r = .386^{**}$ )	7.8%	31.2%	61.1%
Having a difficult time after RC ( $r = -.252^{**}$ )	54.1%	23.0%	23.0%
<b>Life after RC</b>			
More freedom after RC ( $r = .337^{**}$ )	9.2%	9.2%	81.6%
More self-determination after RC ( $r = .338^{**}$ )	5.3%	21.1%	73.7%
Loneliness after RC ( $r = -.324^{**}$ )	61.0%	15.6%	23.4%
Missing the RC group	33.8%	26.0%	40.3%
<b>Transition</b>			
Willing to leave RC	15.6%	14.3%	70.1%
Feeling prepared for transition ( $r = .281^*$ )	16.9%	15.6%	67.6%
Receiving good support from professionals after RC	34.2%	17.1%	48.7%

$r$  = Pearson correlation with well-being at t2     $^{**}$   $p < 0.01$     $^*$   $p < 0.05$

## Conclusion & Implications

- Significant increase in returners' subjective well-being after their return
  - Perception of more freedom and more self-determination points to residential care seen as highly regulated and tightly structured → shown by previous studies on leaving care to independence (Ahmed et al., 2021; Cameron-Mathiassen et al., 2022; Rauktis et al., 2011)
- No significant difference in subjective well-being between returners and remainers
  - Contrast with previous research (Biehal et al., 2016; James et al., 2017)
  - Returners' self-reported subjective well-being is an important perspective
  - Further research needed on the interplay between returners' self-reported subjective well-being, their objective living conditions, and country-specific transition policies

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# Thank you for your attention!

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