The Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a process that brings childhood to an end and turns the individual into a young adult. This process is characterised by the acquisition of new roles for young people, roles linked to the development of personal autonomy that culminate in their emotional and functional independence.

1. Introduction

The support provided by the family system seems to be one of the most crucial aspects that conditions the transition to adulthood. In this regard, children, adolescents, and youths with a regular family system tend to experience fewer difficulties than those partially or fully devoid of this support [1][2]. Research has identified the consequences on the adult due to a complex, prolonged, and difficult (psychological, economic, and social) transition to independence [3]. However, less is known about this process in people in more vulnerable situations, such as ex-ward youths [3][4].

Considering previous research, the transition to adulthood has become increasingly complicated, mainly due to the impact of socioeconomic factors. This is especially challenging for children and youth in vulnerable situations, such as those devoid of family support and those under the tutelage of the State [5][6]. Jackson and Cameron [7] found differences between youths growing up in a stable family system and those who lived under the protection system during childhood and adolescence. The latter experienced a more complex transition not only due to the lack of family support, but also due to other transitions they had previously undergone. During their stay in the foster centre, children and adolescents have to undergo a hard process of personal, cultural, and social adaptation. Therefore, these young people must initiate their transition to adult life even before previous stages are completed [8][9]. By contrast, a stable adaptation process facilitates the creation of social networks, improves academic performance, and aids in the possibility of finding a job [10][11].

The difficulties increase as adolescents under protection leave the system once they reach legal age. López et al. [12] indicated that their transition is shorter, compressed, accelerated and riskier when compared to that of non-risk youth. Gallego et al. [13][14] noted that this transition to adulthood without family support complicates the process, especially due to the lack of the positive effect of family support during the frequently stressful events characterising this period. In addition, physical and mental health (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, etc.,) decreases as a direct effect of the multiple challenges they have to confront [14][15]. Barriers accessing the labour market have also been found, mainly associated with previous failures in the academic performance of children in care [15][16][17]. Moreover, young people in exile, despite coming from dysfunctional families with numerous problems (e.g., inter-relational conflicts, mental health issues), continue to maintain relationships with them [18][19], which contributes to the destabilization of their process of maturation and adult independence.

In sum, research in the field has found that family support is important for the proper development of young people in terms of health and educational or job opportunities during the transition to adulthood. However, not every youth has stable ties with the family, which impacts their transition to autonomy.

2. How Does the Family Influence the Process of Transition to Adulthood? A Comparative Study of Young People with and without Family Ties in Spain

As the result has shown, youths who had stable and durable social networks during their childhood and adolescence were able to access their independent life more effectively. This finding was in the same line as previous research [20]. By contrast, the group of young people without a social network encountered more barriers along the way.

In relation to the use of free time, significant differences were also found, with the Family-YG expressing a different idea of leisure than the Guardianship-YG [21]. Young people who had difficult stages in their lives used leisure as a form of escape, but the group of young people with a stable childhood used leisure for entertainment. They also preferred healthy and cultural leisure activities. We also observed that the opportunities that each group had limited the types of leisure activities they engaged in.

Next, when young people explained their access to the labour market, we can clearly see the differences in terms of the limitations that apply to young people in exile. Due to the notions that have to do with their childhood and family problems, their adequate academic performance has been inadequate, which has an impact on their subsequent access to employment [22]. In addition to poor academic performance, the lack of support they have is also influential, which adds to their problems. However, there is also the extra pressure of time. The young people interviewed were in emancipation flats, and had no more than two years to finish their training and find a job; once this time passes, they were required to leave the facility to start their independent lives. However, young people from "normalised" families have the support of their family for any issues that may affect them in the future [23].

Therefore, we conclude that having an adequate social support network is fundamental to partaking in the basic opportunities and rights of the person, such as access to education, properly using said education, access to the labour market, opportunities for healthy leisure, etc. Having a stable life trajectory facilitates personal success.

The difficulties encountered by young people in long-term care are detrimental to their psychological health, and their psychosocial well-being is not of the same calibre as that of "normalised" young people. Good psychosocial well-being facilitates the development of social skills, which are necessary for decision making and for leading a healthy life in terms of employment and social relationships. This is therefore a further constraint for young people who are ex-wards [24].

Finally, it has been observed that the personal aspirations of each group of young people are also different and are influenced by the instability of their trajectory. The group of young people who have been exempted from social security wanted a job and to start a family. It could be said that these aspirations are realistic and simple. Meanwhile, the other group wanted to have a life of leisure, entertainment, to advance in their job, to be able to travel, and do other kinds of activities.

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