



EMPOWERING  
CARE

## FINNISH RESEARCH REPORT

EMPOWERING CARE. Empowering girls in residential care  
against violence against women.

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## INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
2.1 Data collection .....	3
2.1.1 Interview.....	3
2.1.2. Focus group .....	4
2.1.3. Data .....	4
3. NATIONAL CONTEXT .....	6
3.1. Violence against women in Finland – the social context.....	6
3.2. Violence against women - law .....	8
3.3. Description of the Finnish system of residential care .....	10
4. RESEARCH RESULTS .....	12
4.1. Perceptions and experiences of the girls.....	12
4.1.1. Gender roles .....	12
4.1.2. Social and intimate relationships.....	15
4.1.3. Experiences in residential care units.....	17
4.1.4. Experience of violence.....	19
4.2. Perceptions and experiences of the staff.....	25
4.2.1. Gender stereotypes among the staff membes .....	25
4.2.2. Experiences of violence among girls living in residential care units .....	26
4.2.3. The situation and needs of staff members.....	27
References.....	29

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Empowering Care project has two main objectives: to increase awareness of the prevalence and characteristics of violence experienced by girls aged 14-18 who have been taken into care and live in residential care units in the EU; and to empower those girls to defend and protect both themselves and their peers against violence. Empowering the girls will be done by empowering education programme, which will be based on the research results and will be executed during the spring in 2014.

The particular objectives of the project are to guide professionals working with girls in residential care units on the need to take into account a gender perspective when working with this target group; and to raise awareness among decision-makers about the need to provide protective, preventive, and empowering programmes on gendered violence for girls in care as part of their rehabilitation.

This report includes the main results of the research part of the project. The sample of the study is fairly small which does not make possible for the research information to be generalized, however it gives background information about which matters should be concentrated on in the planning and carrying out the girls' empowering education.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research took place during May 2013 in two different residential care institutions. These institutions are divided into several units, so that the participants came from five different units.

### 2.1 Data collection

The data collection was three-fold:

- Interviews with girls aged 14 - 18 who had been taken into care and lived in residential care units, and who had experienced violence.
- Focus groups with girls aged 14 - 18, who had been taken into care and lived in residential care units, but who had not necessarily experienced violence.
- Focus group with professionals working in residential care units

#### 2.1.1 Interview

The individual interviews were planned to be half-structured, in order to permit the acquisition of comparable data and the study of both sensitive and unconscious issues. The structure of the interview followed the principles of a theme interview, since the main objective was to gain information about the girls' experience of violence (Cohen & Manion 1994, 273; Eskola & Vastamäki 2007, 27; Metsämuuronen 2003, 189).

### Interview topics

- Gender roles and perceptions: perceived differences between women and men in terms of autonomy, space, activities, etc.
- Social and intimate relationships: types of interpersonal relationship, and the balance/imbalance of power, gender differences, and satisfaction with them. Particular emphasis was placed upon intimate relationships.
- Experience of residential care units: feelings, positive and negative aspects.
- Experience of violence: forms, locales, perpetrators, and effects of violence.

### 2.1.2. Focus group

Using focus groups in social research is a relatively recent phenomenon. Collecting data from people in group discussions leads to richer data. The group brings together different people with varied opinions. Usually, focus groups are used to reduce the hierarchical power dynamics between the researcher and the participants. Focus groups can also be supportive, especially with children and young people (Cohen & Manion 1994, 287; McCarry 2005, 96).

In this research, the main purpose of the focus groups was to gain information about shared patterns of behaviour in order to analyse common perceptions, and gender roles and stereotypes.

#### a) Focus groups with girls living in residential care units

The main aim is to discuss and share issues around gender roles and gender stereotypes as well as patterns of behaviour in intimate relationships.

#### b) Focus groups for staff members working in residential care units

The aim of the focus groups with staff members is to gather their perceptions and experiences of working with the girls. The perceptions, opinions, and experiences of staff members provide extremely valuable information on the girls' coping strategies and the features of their experiences of violence, gender roles, and intimate relationships, as well as the needs and limitations of staff members in dealing with gendered violence.

### 2.1.3. Data

Eleven girls took part in individual interviews. The interviews lasted from half an hour to one and a half hours, depending upon the talkativeness of the girls and the time frames set by the residential care unit. Ten interviews were recorded, but one girl denied the use of a recorder.

The girl's focus group interviews were conducted in two different institutions. The first group had five girls and the second only three. Because of the lack of participants in the first two groups, an additional focus group meeting was organised; this was a shared meeting for girls in both institutions. There were five girls in the third focus group, so altogether 13 girls participated in focus group interviews. The number of participants in the focus groups was less than the

project target of 14 girls, but the target of 8-15 in individual interviews was achieved. The project target of seven participants was achieved for the staff members' focus group. All focus group meetings were recorded.

All research interviews were transcribed and analysed.

## 2.2. Difficulties encountered

The main difficulty encountered in the research process was to find organizations with which to co-operate. Overall, of several institutions in the area, only two decided to participate in the research. The others gave similar reasons for their refusal: either they had only boys in their institutions or they had girls whose situation in life and mental condition were too difficult.

Both institutions are closed institutions, where the girl's connections to the outside world are limited and in some cases forbidden totally in order to protect the girl's healthy and safety. Mostly the institutions struggle with youth who have psychological behaving problems, neglecting school and misuse of intoxicants.

Getting a research permit at the management level was easy, and no problems were met in the first institution. All the girls who met the criteria took part in the research and the staff were motivated to help in the arrangements. The award of cinema tickets was evidently a significant factor in the girls' participation.

With the other institution, there were difficulties in getting the research process under way. It is understandable that timetables are tight in this residential care unit, and it demands particular interest and energy from the staff to let them handle additional demands outside their work. The first challenge was to activate the staff to present the research to the girls. The second challenge was that many of the girls were not interested in participating in the research. This problem was solved when the researcher personally visited the residential care unit to talk to the girls, who came along more easily when they had met the researcher and listened to her points of view.

To ensure the success of the individual interviews, the researcher spent some time in the unit and waited for an appropriate time for the next interview. This meant that the interview situations were not equal for every girl, since the available time depended upon the time of day and the the shared activities of the unit. However, being personally present in the unit made it easier to organize focus group meeting for the girls, since a suitable time had to be balanced with each girl's school schedules, hobbies and agreed meetings. This was challenging, since the girls came from three different units. Some girls did not want to participate in the research. They were in life situations where they had neither the space nor the mental strength to participate in anything extra. Recruiting staff for the focus groups designed for them was also eased by being personally in the unit.

It was important to keep in mind ethical aspects regarding the girl's legal rights and mental health throughout the research process. The range of violence reported

and experienced by the girls was diverse, as were its effects. For every story of violence, it was necessary to consider whether there was any immediate danger that the girl would be exposed to violence again, whether the issue had been processed both mentally and concretely or is it currently under process, and whether the issue was known by the residential care staff.

In one case, the researcher and the girl involved decided together that the symptoms caused to the girl were so severe that she needed to begin therapy in order to deal with her experiences. The researcher supported the girl when this was mentioned to the staff. Mostly the girls actively process their experiences with the aid of professional helpers. In some cases events interpreted as violence had occurred in a residential care unit. Those situations required additional clarification by the researcher, but the issues had been handled according to the protocol of the residential care unit.

### 3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

#### 3.1. Violence against women in Finland – the social context

Violence against women is a significant issue in Finland. International supervisory bodies on human rights have made several comments to Finland about the frequency of violence against women. CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) has called attention to the frequency of violence against women in Finland since the beginning of the 21st century. In 2008, CEDAW published a report on Finland, in which they also brought up sexual harassment against women, violence experienced by immigrant and Romany women, and the high number of deaths among women caused by domestic violence.

The death rate among women from domestic violence is high by Western European standards; 80 percent of those dying from domestic violence are women. In 2002-2009. Altogether 165 women died through the actions of a current or former partner of opposite gender. (Lehti 2010, 21-24.)

The committee also expressed concern over the gender-neutral language used in the politics of preventing violence against women. The use of gender-neutral language diminishes the point of view that this kind of violence clearly represents discrimination against women. The committee also expressed concern about the use of conciliation procedures in domestic violence cases. CEDAW encouraged authorities to ensure that there are enough shelters available for the victims of violence and that those shelters have adequate financial resources. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.<sup>1</sup>)

In 2007, the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (acting under the UN's financial and social council) gave a note to Finland concerning the frequency of domestic violence, and especially violence against women, and also concerning

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<sup>1</sup> Report on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence by a working group preparing the ratification of the convention of the Council of Europe (28.3.2013).

the lack of special legislation on domestic violence in Finland. In 2011, the UN Committee against Torture recommended, among other matters, that Finland should enact legislation to increase the availability of shelters for victims of violence and human trafficking. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The adequate amount of shelters is significant, because previous violence within a relationship is common in domestic homicides. During the years 2002–2007 as many as half of the relationships that led to homicides had previously involved physical violence. The man is usually both the source of violence and the perpetrator of homicide. (Salmi, Lehti, Sirén, Kivivuori & Aaltonen 2009, 3.) Separation is the most dangerous period for women. It is estimated that during the years 2003–2009 the death rate due to domestic violence among women who were separating or had recently separated from a violent partner was at least ten times greater than among women in relationships. (Lehti 2010, 23.)

In 2012, in a universal periodic review (UPR) under the UN Human Rights Council, several recommendations were approved for Finland, including continuance of sufficient procedures and confirmation of legislative development in order to prevent violence against women, domestic violence, and the secondary victimization of victims, and to prosecute the perpetrators. In 2012, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe stated in a report that Finland still has not enough shelters and that reducing violence against women requires adequate resources and coordination. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

In Finland, attempts have been made to track the prevalence of violence against women by means of victim research. The first research on women as victims was done in 1997 (Heiskanen & Piispa) and though the research was renewed in 2005 (Piispa, Heiskanen, Kääriäinen & Sirén), it has not been repeated since then. National victim research suggests that the domestic violence experienced by women aged 15–74 remained approximately the same in the 2000's (Sirén, Aaltonen & Kääriäinen 2010, 12-13).

In 2005, research on women as victims suggested that 20 percent had been a target of physical or sexual violence or threat at least once by their current partner. During the previous year, eight percent of women had faced this. Six percent of all women had experienced mild physical violence in their current relationship during the most recent year, and one percent had experienced severe physical violence. The women most often told of threats (32% of the women) and physical violence (mild 43% and severe 29% of the women) offered by their previous partner. Five percent had faced sexual violence in their current relationship; for a previous relationship, the rate was 16 percent. (Piispa 2006, 44.)

Young girls are an age group that experiences violence in several life sectors: at home, in school, and in their spare time. The most common form of violence faced by young women is sexual violence. In Finland, half of all girls aged fifteen have



experienced sexual harassment, over ten percent attempted sexual coercion, and more than four percent have been forced into sex (Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, 150).

Of violent sexual crimes against girls aged under fifteen reported to police in 2007, nearly 90 % were classified as sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse of a child. Around ten percent were classified as more severe sexual violence (rape and attempted rape, aggravated sexual assault, forced sexual intercourse, etc.) The victims were mostly girls (88 %). According to sexual crime statistics, the number of female victims in different age groups remains relatively stable up to the age of 11, after which the proportion of female victims rises explosively from the age of 12. (Humppi 2008, 6.) The threat of violence outside the home is real, but most violence against girls occurs at home and in their close relationships (Heiskanen & Piispa 1998, 150).

### 3.2. Violence against women - law

Section 6 of the Constitution of Finland contains provisions on equality and the prohibition of discrimination, while section 6 subsection 1 includes the requirement that both the legislature and those who apply the law uphold human legal equality. Section 6 subsection 2 of the Constitution contains a comprehensive prohibition of discrimination, which states that no one shall, without acceptable reason, be differently treated on the basis of gender, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other personal characteristic. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

Section 7 of the Constitution guarantees everyone the right to life, personal liberty, integrity, and security; while section 22 states that public authorities shall guarantee the application of civil liberties and human rights.

The Act on equality between men and women (609/1986, hereinafter referred to as the Equality Act) aims to prevent gender discrimination and to promote gender equality. Although the Equality Act is of general application, the legal obligations imposed by the law, and the penalties for failure to comply, depend upon the sphere of life. Outside the scope of the Act remain, inter alia, relationships between family members and other relationships within the private sphere. The Equality Act can be applied together with other laws, so that for example, sexual harassment in the workplace may be covered not only by the Equality Act, but also by Section 28 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002) covering interference; and the case might also meet the statutory definition of an offense under work safety law (Criminal Code, chapter 47, section 1). In addition, section 14a of the Equality Act contains a reference provision on workplace discrimination (Criminal Code, chapter 47, section 3). (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004) prohibits discrimination in employment and education because of age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability, gender orientation (sexual

orientation), and other personal characteristics. Discrimination based on ethnic origin is also prohibited in social and health services or in the provision of any generally available property or service. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The commission on the pending reform of anti-discrimination legislation suggested (Committee Report 2009:4) the reform of the existing law in such a way that discrimination should be forbidden in all public and private activities, with the exception of matters pertaining to the private sphere. According to the proposal, reasons for discrimination prohibited by anti-discrimination legislation would be age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political action, trade union activity, family relationships, health, disability, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The Criminal Code contains provisions, for instance, on assault (chapter 21, sections 5-7), rape (chapter 20, sections 1-3), and the illegal termination of pregnancy (chapter 22, sections 1-2). In addition, certain actions can be punished, in accordance with the Convention, for example, trafficking in human beings (chapter 25, sections 3 and 3a) or defamation (chapter 24, sections 9-10). (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

In recent years, the criminal law has undergone a number of changes in provisions concerning domestic violence and sexual assault. In January 2011, a change in chapter 21, section 16 of the Criminal Code entered into force (1082/2010), according to which petty assault in a close relationship became subject to public prosecution. In June 2011, a change in chapter 20, section 1.2 of the Criminal Code entered into force (495/2011), as a result of which sexual intercourse with a defenceless person is defined as rape, regardless of whether the state of defencelessness is self-inflicted or whether it is temporary or permanent. At the same time, a change in the Criminal Code entered into force (540/2011) by which provision concerning sexual offenses against children were made more stringent, and the range of punishable offenses was extended. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

In April 2012, a Ministry of Justice working group (Ministry of Justice reports and opinions, 24/2012) proposed that a penal provision on stalking should be added to the Criminal Code. The report shows that the proposal is mainly based on the requirements of the Convention. The government submitted a proposal on this matter in March 2013 (HE 19/2013 vp). (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The Ministry of the Interior has established a legislative project on human trafficking and victim assistance for the period 1.2.2012 - 31.12.2013 (SM008:00/2012). The objective of the project is to draw up proposals for the more precise regulation of the system for assisting victims of human trafficking, while paying attention also to victims of forced marriage within the system for assisting victims of human trafficking. A report by a task force on human trafficking appointed by the Ministry of Justice (Ministry of Justice reports and opinions 63/2012) on

trafficking provisions in the Criminal Code was published in October 2012. The aim of legislative reform is to consider forced marriage as part of the definition of human trafficking. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The Act on the Restraining Order (898/1998) allows for the imposition of a restraining order in situations where there is reason to believe that the person against whom the prohibition is sought might commit a crime against the life, health, liberty, or peace of the person who feels threatened, or otherwise seriously harass them. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

The law on social welfare will be reformed with the aim of promoting the assessment of support needs. For example, in partner and family violence the need for support includes situations where a person has experienced violence or the threat of violence, or been exposed to the effects of violence, in their family or other close relationships. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.) In the future, Finland will implement the Istanbul Convention, the aim of which is to improve legislation specifically to prevent violence against women. (Työryhmän mietintö [Working group report] 28.3.2013.)

### 3.3. Description of the Finnish system of residential care

In child welfare work, transfer of guardianship is the means of last resort in securing a child's growth and development. It is a measure that interferes strongly with the child's constitutionally prescribed rights and with the autonomy of the family guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. Thus, it presents questions of legal protection from the viewpoint of the child, family, and employees. (Handbook of Child Welfare<sup>2</sup>.)

Before transfer of guardianship occurs, the situation of the child and the family must be comprehensively assessed. Transfer of guardianship is the means of last resort in securing a child's growth and development, and priority must be given to allowing children to live with their parents. If the best solution for the child is placement outside the home, transfer of guardianship should take place as soon as possible. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

The child must be taken into care by an institution responsible for social welfare and foster care if:

- inadequacies in the child's care or other growth conditions seriously threaten the child's health or development
- the child seriously endangers his or her health or development by the use of intoxicants, by committing non-minor criminal acts, or by any comparable behaviour that endangers the child's health and development (Child Welfare Act, section 40; Finlex) (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

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<sup>2</sup> The Handbook of Child Welfare is an online service for social professionals. Content is produced by National Institute for Health and Welfare, Children, Young People and Families Section. <http://www.sosiaaliportti.fi/fi-FI/Lastensuojelu/>

However, children may be taken into care and fostered only if:

- community care interventions are not suitable or possible solutions for care that is in the child's interests, or they are proven to be inadequate
- foster care is evaluated as being in the child's interest.

Decisions on transfer of guardianship can be made only if all of the above conditions exist at the same time. Thus, for example, a child's behaviour or inadequate care of the child is not alone a sufficient reason for transfer of guardianship. Transfer of guardianship always requires that other conditions are met, such as the inadequacy of community care support, and that custody and care outside the home (foster care) is in the child's interest. In assessment, the child's individual symptoms are not conclusive conditions for transfer of guardianship; the child's overall care needs must be assessed. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

For example, poor housing, lack of housing, and inadequate income cannot alone be the bases for transfer of guardianship. In these situations, steps should be taken to repair the specific deficiencies, to organize adequate housing conditions or sufficient financial support for the family, as required by the Child Welfare Act, section 35 (Handbook of Child Welfare).

According to section 49 of the Child Welfare Act, child fostering refers to the care and upbringing outside the home of a child who has been taken into care, urgently placed, or placed under an interim order according to section 83 of the Child Welfare Act. The foster care of a child can be organised as family care, institutional care, or otherwise as required by the needs of the child. According to section 37 of the Child Welfare Act, the child welfare institutions in which foster care can be arranged in accordance with child welfare law and the community care support placement signified in section 37 are children's homes, community homes, and other comparable child welfare institutions. Comparable child welfare institutions are family home communities, family support and family rehabilitation services, and family group homes. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

As defined in the action plan, the unit may specialize, for example, in the mentally handicapped, those with psychiatric symptoms, or the care of children and young people requiring alcohol and drug rehabilitation. In these cases, also it should be noted that a child welfare unit is in question, where placement occurs because of the Child Welfare Act. The personnel structure and dimensioning must take into account the nature of the work and the eligibility requirements for personnel. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

### Family Care

Family care refers to the organization of the care, education, and other full-time provision for a child outside his or her home, in a private home or foster family. The family carers of children and young people are also known as foster parents. Family care may be used to organize care and provision for children and young people taken into care, to organize care and provision for urgently placed children and young people, or when children or young people are placed in community

care support. Some family carers also work as support families. Support family operations are included in non-institutional social care and child-protection support. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

#### Professional foster homes

Professional foster homes are positioned between foster care and institutional foster care. Professional foster homes look after children who, for example, cannot be placed in a foster home owing to caring difficulties. Normally, fostered children share a common home with two people who are responsible for their care and upbringing. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

#### Children's home, youth home

Children's homes and youth homes try to create an everyday life that is as home-like, safe, and rehabilitative as possible. In addition to normal everyday life, different institutions naturally have their own special fields, special interests, and expertise. (Handbook of Child Welfare.)

#### Community homes

Community homes have a long-term position as the foster place of last resort for children and young people. The special care units in community homes refer to the special care needs of difficult to treat and even dangerous young people. The criteria for placement often relate to neglect of school attendance or serious endangerment of their own or other people's health or safety, but in the background are also more severe psychiatric problems than before. The need for a special care unit often concerns young people who demonstrate more than one symptom requiring adolescent psychiatric care.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. Perceptions and experiences of the girls

Thirteen girls participated in the group interview in which the girls' perceptions and experiences toward the gender, gender roles and social and intimate relationships were examined. Eleven girls participated in the individual interviews in which also their experiences of violence and time in residential care institution were explored. The research results are presented through the above-mentioned research themes.

#### 4.1.1. Gender roles

The girl's ways of speaking, and their perceptions of gender and gender roles, were divided into three different categories:

- 1) Maintaining a patriarchal social structure, where men are dominant over women in wealth, status and power in socially, politically and economically.

- 2) Gender-neutral and gender-blind, where gender differences were not recognized.
- 3) Gender-awareness and gender-sensitive, where gender and gender roles were problematized.

### *Maintaining a patriarchal social structure*

A few girls talking along the first category connected being a girl directly with the traditional gendered tasks of a patriarchal social structure, such as housework and raising children. The man on the other hand was seen in the traditional role of provider.

Researcher: What does it mean to you to be a girl?

Girl\_1: Well... giving birth... and cooking and...

Girl\_2: Men are doing everything...men give you money and women do all the housework, the man is going to work.

The differences between girls and boys were mostly defined through physical difference. The woman's role also included demands in terms of physical appearance, the purpose of which was to demonstrate that they are specifically women. Masculine dress and hairstyles were not approved.

Girl: I don't know if this has something to do with gender roles, but I think: if you're a woman, you need to look like a woman.

Girl: Well, that's quite an odd style (boyish clothing and hairstyle).

Girls used their own femininity and related factors in conflict situations, at least at the level of speech.

Girl: Boobs on the counter and you'll get away just with a warning.

Gendered rules were pointed up only when the rules were more favourable towards boys than girls.

Girl: Boys are allowed to talk dirtier or no-one bothers much about it, I don't know... Boys just have like...

A violence-related rule that was apparently gendered, was that boys are not allowed to hit girls, but girls are allowed to hit boys. However, in practice, the "rule" did not succeed and the boys hit the girls as well.

Girl: I think it's a good thing that they always say you can't hit girls, but it's good that when you're a girl you can smack the guys just whenever you want... On the other hand, I've been hit back pretty heavily, but it's like, I don't know...

Girls maintaining a patriarchal social structure had very strong perceptions and challenging attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexual relationships.

### *Gender-blindness and gender-neutrality*

Over half of the girls used gender-neutral language and they felt that they were able to do all the things that boys did. They were aware that equality is not put into practice in society, but they were unable to explain how this came about. Girls were unable to link any specific matters with being a girl on a personal or societal level or on the level of social expectations and norms.

The differences in relation to boys were seen in terms of physical strength and specifically defined by adults: boys were forced to do all the physically demanding jobs and girls did the tasks that did not require physical strength. Physical difference also affected the fact that being a girl was seen as an obstacle to dressing as revealingly as boys are allowed to dress.

Girl: Well, girls get pointed out more frequently about the clothes, like here for example, that your shoulders should be covered, but not all that much. Girls in shorts might get more comments than boys, well, the shorts boys wear are probably a bit different ...but anyway. I reckon girls get more comments about their clothes.

Researcher: So you can't wear as revealing clothes as the boys do?

All: Yeah.

### *Gender-awareness and gender-sensitivity*

Three girls spoke in a very gender-conscious way. They were aware of the apparent state of equity in society, which is not fulfilled, however, in every sector of life. Girls were able to analyze and give examples of how societal expectations and norms affected being a girl and how the maintenance of gender stereotypes was encouraged.

Girl: I think that it (being a girl) shouldn't be connected to any special standards, but unfortunately that's just the way it goes, that a woman is... Unfortunately, what's expected from a woman is exactly what we've just listed, femininity and fine behaviour, cooking, making food, taking care of children. There shouldn't be any such expectations; you should just be what you are. There shouldn't be any demands that you should know how to cook and clean, and you should want to be a mother and blaa blaa. And the fact is that most people fall into this category, that they really want that brave man and two children and...

Girl: The question was about what do you think?

Girl: I think that...let's be what we are and it's nobody's business.

The girls divided the issue of gender into biological and social aspects.

Girl: The fact is that a woman is a woman if she has a cunt.

All: Just right!

Girl: A man should know how to clean as well, a man should be able to cook, and it's got nothing to do with how feminine you are, I'M a woman, too.

However, the girls also understood the plurality of gender on many different levels.

Girl: ...you can be something in between.

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Girl: There are friends where girls look like boys and the other way round.

Girls, speaking in gender-conscious way, felt that they could do the same things as boys, but at the same time, they also realized the limitation set by society on both genders. The girls also brought up the gendered behaviour patterns of adults. The girls also gender-sensitively re-structured and challenged the gender and the gender stereotypes in their own actions.

#### 4.1.2. Social and intimate relationships

Generally, girls' satisfaction toward their current human relationships was low, because they felt that their relationships were limited too much. Talking about close relationships seemed challenging, because the girls felt that they don't have much social interaction with anybody. The girls' short-spoken way of telling about human relationships was indicative of their lack of human relationships.

The girls' relationships have been analyzed for two different periods: the period before entering residential care and the time since entering residential care. Especial focus is on their relationships with friends, dating partners, and relatives, and how power and gender differences appear in these.

##### *Relationships before entering residential care*

Before entering residential care, almost all the girls had many friends. Almost all of them went out in large groups of 10-20 friends containing both girls and boys, but usually more boys. The girls felt that their own behaviour remained the same whether they were in company with boys or girls. One girl explained the gender-distribution in the groups as follows:

Girl: Yeah, I don't like chicks, no, no... Horrible shrews.

In the groups, power was evenly divided; everybody's opinions were considered and everybody participated in deciding, for example, what they should do and when. However, the activities of the groups mostly concentrated on those that had led to the girls' being taken into care.

Girl: Well, we were over some youth house drinking and smoking and doing everything...we were always tough guys, doing everything, bullying and stuff...

Girl: We did everything we're in here for.



Girl: Getting drunk, beating people up, mixing drugs, having wild unprotected sex, dating...

In individual interviews, the girls spoke very little about their dating relationships, but in group interviews many matters arose which showed that many of the girls had had dating relationships and had been sexually active.

The girls' experience of their their own families depended on whether or not there had been violence in the family. Girls who came from non-violent families generally had good relationships with their families, but they spent more time with their friends than at home.

### *Relationships after entering the residential care unit*

Being taken into a residential care unit had meant, in some cases, that the parents of the girl's friends had tried to end the friendship.

Girl: Well, when I was a civilian, I had lots of friends and so on. But now that I've come here, behind God's back, to this ass place, well... All my friends' parents have started to like, you can't be friends with her, when she's in an institution, she's a total criminal, so that's it, now I've only a couple of friends left back home, when I used to have dozens of them and now there's just a couple left.

Researcher: How does it feel when somebody...?

Girl: Well, pretty bad. And I'd like to go and say to the parents that what's your problem, I'm normal enough even if I happen to live in here.

The girls thought that their previous friendships were not supported but that they were being deliberately separated from them. Some girls escape from residential care precisely because they want to see their friends.

Girls thought that they were not allowed to keep up even the friendships and peer support relationships that they made in the residential care unit. These are denied by forbidding shared activities such as going to the sauna and shared sporting activities, and by forbidding talk on certain subjects.

Girl: You're not allowed to talk with other young people about some things, like booze and drugs and stuff, but an awful lot in here have the problem that everything just happens to link to those, especially if you go a bit deeper into the history, then somewhere there's always that...

It was thought that girls in homosexual relationships had more freedom to maintain their dating relationships than girls in heterosexual relationships; and that this was due to the non-existing possibility of becoming pregnant. The girls think that the staff of the residential care unit do nothing to support their heterosexual dating relationships, so their relationships cannot last. Girls felt that the staff pressured them into birth control and for many girls starting birth control

was a condition for a leave of absence. It caused the girls to have dubious feelings about themselves:

Girl: ...makes you feel like you're a whore.

In some cases, girls were forbidden to contact their parent or parents, mostly owing to a parent's misuse of intoxicants. Overall, girls felt that their most important family relationships were not supported at all. However, it became clear that the power of parenthood remained considerable after a child was taken into care. In three different cases, girls were pressured to maintain contact with parents who had behaved violently towards them, even if the girl herself did not wish to do so. The pressure came mostly from the social workers who had ordered the girl to be taken into care, rather than from staff in the residential care unit. The legal guardian was also able to restrict a girl's relationships to her other relatives.

#### 4.1.3. Experiences in residential care units

Girls felt that being taken into care, and the actions that accompanied it, were somewhat traumatic experiences. The young person is not told in advance of being taken to a residential care unit; the order is executed without warning so that the girl will not have an opportunity to run away. The situation is made more traumatic, among other things, by the use, in some cases, of exaggerated and humiliating use of force:

Girl: ...one morning I was just, I probably was sleeping, when my mum just came and said it's time to go. I didn't believe it at first, because I 'd just begun to settle down and so on and then suddenly it was...we live in an area with blocks of flats, so then there was police, social workers, in the car there were police dogs and everything... our backyard was surrounded and the whole place was full of police. Then all the neighbours were looking from their windows, when the police were taking me to the police car, I wasn't even told where they were taking me. We drove to the yard of the social office and I was just crying there, because I didn't know what I 've done and where they're taking me and so on. Then there in the social office yard there were all those police around and then there was this social worker. I tried to ask where they were taking me, but they didn't tell me even there. Then there were these residential care workers, I went with them, and when I was here I saw where we are and I was like oh fuck, the worst place a person can end up. Well it turned out that it wasn't so bad after all...

For some girls, who have been in several residential care institutions, the closed institutions that are the subjects of this research are the last place that will accept the girl in question.

Girl: Well, nowhere else will have me any more, because of all that stuff...no other place will take me with my background... they won't have me, and this is the last place left when I've got so much stuff...running away and drugs and...

### *Positive aspects of residential care*

Even though the primary attitude of the girls was that they were bitter about being taken into care and hated the residential care unit, when asked separately, they also found some positive aspects about residential care units. Some were even grateful that they had been taken to that particular residential care unit.

Researcher: How you have experienced being here?

Girl\_1: Good and I'm really grateful that I got here, because I really like this place a lot!

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Girl\_2: They really do support young people here, at times it feels that maybe too much, but it's not such a bad thing anyway./Yes, they do support young people in starting a new life.

In regard to staff, the residential care unit school and its teachers were seen as a good thing. Other staff members in the institution were also felt to be approachable people, whom it was easy to turn to.

Girl: School, school is salvation./ Well, at school yes, especially the teachers are like, at least my teacher, you can talk about everything to her and she really respects us, and doesn't think we're some criminal drug addicts, and we'll never become anything, she really cares about us.

Girl: Well, in here, there are quite nice staff, always if you're pissed off, you can go and talk with them.

The residential care unit was considered a safe place, particularly if the girl had met with violent experiences at home. It was also understood that it was easier to get help through the unit. The economic benefit, such as money for clothes, was considered a good thing, together with the presence of other young people. Girls also found some positive features in the practices of the institution.

Girl: It's an institution, but again in a way it's really simple, because when there are certain rules, when you take care of things and so on, you know what the results will be.

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Girl: It's kind of good that you do things yourself around here; in the previous place things were done for you, food was done for you, all the doctor's appointments and everything were phoned for you and everywhere you went, you were driven there. But in here you walk or go by bus and if you want an appointment for a hairdresser, you phone there yourself and if you want to see a doctor, you phone the doctor and so on... And you fix the food yourself. So I've learnt to do a lot of stuff myself in here.

### *Negative aspects of residential care*

Girls spoke about the negative aspects of residential care without being asked, and the biggest issue provoking negative emotions in the operation of the unit was the *same for all the girls*: losing their freedom and being isolated from their family

and friends. Some girls even had very negative feelings about being in the residential care unit.

Girl: Somehow the restriction, there's no freedom for people and young people need freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom to be, freedom to go and come as you please.

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Girl: ...such a hell, it took weeks to learn all the rules for everything.

Girls also commented about staff yelling and complaining, calling such events “the staff’s occasional fits”; and some staff members were considered poor examples for young people. Some girls considered the staff members generally homophobic while the tasks of staff members were thought to be gendered. Some young people felt that they were unable to be themselves with all the supervisors, and that not all the staff members listened to them.

Girl: It started a complaint right away; somebody opened her trap as soon as I tried to say something. Something like that, so I just kept my mouth shut and did the housework and that was that.

Some girls felt that having staff members shout at them and hold them down seemed like violence toward themselves; they said that staff members “throw you down” even in small quarrels.

Girls felt that staff members did not always give them clear instructions on how to act. For example if a condition for extra freedom was earning trust, girls felt that they did not necessarily know what earning trust involved, or how they could earn it and what kind of trust was enough.

Some girls felt that their diagnoses were false and unfair, especially if a result was that they lost something involved in their own identity.

Girl: Then they started to insist that I am a self-harming person, because I 've got these marks here (shows the cuts on her wrists), but I got most of them in a fight or when I was running around drunk, and so on... I've never said that I'd harm myself; I'm not a bit suicidal, but suddenly I'm suicidal, and these people... I don't know; it's just got ridiculous and all...

#### 4.1.4. Experience of violence

The definitions of violence varied a lot among the girls and in three cases, only physical violence was considered as violence.

Researcher: What do you think violence is? What does it mean to you?

Girl: Weeeel, [laughs] it's touching other people in a way that hurts... Yeah, touching other people in a way that hurts.

Researcher: So it's just physical?

Girl: Yeah...

In some cases, physical violence was not seen even as bad treatment toward oneself. Definitions of physical violence easily came to include a varying scale; for example, hitting might be physical violence only if one hits hard enough.

Researcher: Do you have any relationships where you are treated badly?  
Even now perhaps...

Girl: Oh [laughs] like badly in what way?

Researcher: You can decide what you consider bad treatment, but for  
example bossing you around and so on...

Girl: Well, I don't think so, there's a bit of a tussle sometimes or  
something like that, but it's that kind of a small thing.

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Girl: It kind of depends on whether they hit hard or not...

Only one girl analysed violence as including physical, sexual, and mental violence. Seven girls defined violence in binary terms as physical and mental violence, however, only three girls have noted the hidden forms of mental violence.

Girl: Of course there's like physical violence, that's the logical answer to  
that, but of course, all the mental stuff and blackmailing and putting  
someone in a situation where she's mentally compelled into a corner, so  
in my mind that's violence as well. Sort of manipulation, control, of  
course it's understandable up to a point, but when it's dominating and so  
on, I think it can be considered as violence.

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Girl: Mental violence is maybe the worst at least for me, because I'm a  
deep person, I usually think everything so deeply... but such as basic  
beating, sexual violence and I think threatening with violence is also like  
that or something wordless, without doing anything, I suppose that's  
mental violence, that you're not doing anything violent, but you're able  
to get a person to do something, because you know the person is afraid  
of you, particularly because of some violence, yeah, that's it.

### *Sexual violence*

Eight of the girls had been approached with sexual suggestions, but the girls themselves did not notice this as sexual violence. Within these eight girls, two girls had been raped, which in one case had led to a court hearing. Two girls had also been sexually abused: one case has led to a court hearing, while in the second case the girl has not recognized the deeds as legally punishable, even though they can be classified as sexual abuse<sup>3</sup>:

Researcher: And has anybody ever tried to touch you in an  
uncomfortable way?

Girl: Well, it's been touched, there hasn't been any permission asking at  
that point. [laughs]

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<sup>3</sup> **Section 5** (24.7.1998/563) **Sexual abuse.** A person shall also be sentenced for sexual abuse if he/she takes advantage of the incapacity of another to defend himself/herself or to make or express a decision, owing to unconsciousness, illness, handicap or other helplessness, and has sexual intercourse with him/her, or gets him/her to perform a sexual act essentially violating his/her right of sexual self-determination or to submit to such an act.

Researcher: Really? That has happened?

Girl: Yeah.

Researcher: How have those situations progressed? Have you tried to stop it?

Girl: No, no, I've been so wasted I haven't been able to do anything...

Researcher: So in a way somebody has abused you...?

Girl: That's right.

In one case, a girl's parent and staff members at the residential unit had defined the girl's dating relationship as sexual abuse of a child, but the court decided that it was a normal dating relationship.

At least three girls had been subjected to "grooming". Grooming means persuading a child/the adolescent for sexual purposes without precondition of having a physical meeting (Finnish Criminal Law 20:8b). One girl had been exposed to sexual interference and abuse when she sent sexual images downloaded from the Internet as her own pictures to older men in exchange for money. In addition, two girls had benefited from their own sexuality in order to get alcohol and drugs from adult men. In one case, the 17-year old friend of one girl acted as a so-called "payer" and performed sexual services for men. In another case the strategy of the girl and her friend was to leave when they had drunk enough, but sometimes the situation became dangerous when the man/men started to come on to the girls.

The men involved were usually familiar to some extent. The most common scene for these events was a private home.

### *Mental violence*

All the girls had experienced mental violence from family members, friends, school peers, or dating partners. Violence done by family members took place at home; in other cases, the most common place was a private apartment or public outside area.

One girl had suffered multiple forms of mental violence. The most typical forms of mental violence were noticed, such as face-to-face yelling and criticizing. The most hidden forms of violence, such as social exclusion, talking and criticizing behind their backs, and manipulation, were not spotted by most of the girls. One girl had also suffered long-term bullying and mental violence at a nursery and school.

The removal of freedom as a punishment was also felt to be a form of mental violence. One girl thought that actions taken in the residential care unit constituted mental violence, because they had driven her mentally into a corner.

Researcher: Do you think you have experienced mental violence?

Girl: Well, I could probably say I have... In that previous place, in that other unit, it really was like I was pushed into a corner.

Manipulation and threatening to hurt oneself was common among the girls' friends.

Researcher: Have you ever had someone threaten to do something to her/himself if you don't do something?

Girl: Yeah, sure, there's plenty of those cases, plenty...

### *Physical violence*

Nine of the girls had experienced physical violence from family members, boyfriends, or half-unknown male acquaintances. One girl had suffered a continuous aggravated battery from male immigrant acquaintances of a female friend. Usually the girls have no clear recollection of the situation owing to their use of different intoxicants; but in some cases, a fight had ensued when the girl refused to do something that the men wanted her to do. Violence done by family members happened at home; otherwise, the most common location was a private apartment or public outside area.

For girls following a patriarchal social structure, their experiences of physical violence were often mixed with their own resistance.

Researcher: Do you think you have experienced violence?

Girl: Sometimes [laughs] more or less.

Researcher: Would you like to tell us more about it? What kind of violence was it and in what kind of situations did it happen?

Girl: Well, I've even had it from a knife and...well that's the worst that's happened and... Then what happens quite often nowadays, at least in these circles, is that you get punched, that's from the guys pretty much, because if a women starts to tell them off, it's easy to give it back. And when a man comes to hit you, there's nothing you can do about it.

Researcher: You said that guys come and hit you? Are these situations that happened when you'd run away?

Girl: Mostly, yeah.

Researcher: Guys you've only half known?

Girl: Well they are... But when I've been seriously beaten, they've been like some boyfriends or something like that, and when you start a fight, you end up getting smacked more easily.

In violent acts that happened at home, three cases involved the girl's mother and in one case the perpetrator was an older brother. Alcohol was a factor in two cases of long-lasting violent acts by mothers. Violence done by mothers has included fistfights, sometimes throwing things, and in once case, beating, kicking, and strangling. The following violence situation took place after the social welfare authorities placed the girl back to her mother against the girl's own will:

Girl: The end result was I was lying in our hall on the floor and Mum was kicking and beating me./ She just threw me on the floor and started to strangle me and even then she said if I had a gun, I'd shoot you on the spot.

In the case of violence by an older brother, the violence had continued for almost the girl's whole life, before she was taken into care. The brother had used physical violence in situations where the girl had not agreed to do as he wished.

Girl: It was the summer holiday and Mum went to work and left some food for us in the fridge. My brother had already eaten his and when I was going to eat mine, he told me I wasn't allowed to eat it, that he was going to eat it. And when I tried to eat it, he...of course I fought back, then he started to hit me and so forth and if I didn't give him my stuff, then that too, stuff like that...

Researcher: Where did he usually hit you?

Girl: He hit me everywhere, usually he did it so he sat on me and held my hands in place with his knees and...

### *Physical violence done by the girls themselves*

Seven girls had used physical violence toward others and in two of these situations; the girls had defended themselves physically toward their family members. Often the violence done by girls had started from mental violence, bullying, which caused the girl to use physical violence. Violent situations were usually street fights or fights in private homes under the influence of intoxicants.

One girl felt that using physical violence was fun:

Researcher: Well, do you remember at what age you first "beat up" somebody?

Girl: I think I was twelve years old. Man, it was fun!!

Researcher: Fun?

Girl: The first time I was a bit scared and all that. But then I thought I can't just like slap with my palm, like everybody else does, but then I had the courage...like to give...beat her, man it was.. Then again I even like WON there, so ...

Researcher: What was so fun about it?

Girl: It was the feeling of winning, you know. It didn't feel nice in that situation to smack somebody, but then when I knew that I won it just gave me that kind of feeling of victory or something.

One girl explained her previous violent behaviour as a need for adrenaline, where the hitting was fulfilling this need. Another girl told of being violent "just for fun". However, there was serious violence in the backgrounds of both girls, which the girls themselves thought that they were working out through their violent behaviour.

A few girls said that others made them snap by their irritating behaviour or on the other hand, they thought that alcohol affected their levels of tolerance and aggression.



Girl: Well it means, when I've been drinking booze it's like...if somebody looks me just slightly the wrong way I've already got my fists up.

### *The results of violence*

It is difficult to estimate, what girls' symptoms are consequences of the experiences of the violence. However, every girl had used various intoxicants and most of them had shown symptoms of depression. Nine of the girls have had bad thoughts toward themselves, in which two girls had tried to kill themselves and seven had cut herself. The girls did not themselves see cutting as a major issue.

Researcher: Have you had any bad thoughts toward yourself?

Girl: Oh, like I want to kill myself?

Researcher: For example.

Girl: Well, maybe sometimes, but not any more.

Researcher: But you haven't done anything?

Girl: Nothing major, but things like using a knife on my arm and stuff, things like that...

Their experience of physical violence has caused the girls to have remarkably reduced survival instincts and has meant that they are no longer able to fear violence.

Girl: It's not often like it would scare me, for some reason I don't know how to be scared.

Girl: I don't know, maybe it's like, because you're so used to it, you've seen it so much, also experienced a bit and so on, so you just don't have any fear of it. In a way, I don't have any respect left for physical violence. I don't give in to anything anymore if somebody claims that he's going to beat me, I just tell him to get on with it. It doesn't mean that I don't appreciate myself, but you know it's only going to hurt a moment and what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

From the viewpoint of both the perpetrators and the victims, violence had led to violence becoming a binding factor in a certain community, but at the same time, it hardened the personality and was difficult to let go.

Researcher: If you think of your whole life history and the violence in it, both what you've done and what you've experienced, how do you think it has affected you?

Girl: Well, somehow in a good way, but somehow in a really bad way, like in a really DARK way. Like...it's really contradictory, you know. Because in principle it's a good thing that I can defend myself and give it back in kind, but on the other hand when you start to think about who I've smacked and what's happened to them as a result ... And so on... After all it's quite a bad thing

Researcher: Do you think you have had to become tougher?

Girl: Yeah. It makes the person tougher. And you can't get out of it any more. When you're with your friends, friends are around you, when these things have happened, so you're not getting out of that anymore.

One girl had experienced sexual violence particularly from an immigrant man, which caused her a period of hatred against immigrants, which has now passed by. Sexual abuse had also caused girls to have one-night stands. For another girl, her violent experiences have meant that situations that remind her of her earlier traumatic experiences cause her a momentary loss of consciousness and self-control.

Girl: If something happens that reminds me of a similar situation, I have a blackout and like that. Just recently I was asking about something, someone started shouting at me with no warning and I was so scared by it, because it was so sudden and all. So I just took off from the situation. Or if the supervisor had been near me, the reaction probably wouldn't have been like that. It just presses in me afterwards, because really, if I have this blackout, I can't control myself at all at that moment.

## 4.2. Perceptions and experiences of the staff

The research included a study of perceptions and experiences among the staff on gender roles and the violence experienced by girls living in the residential care unit. Focus was also on the challenges occurring in the staff's work. Seven professionals participated the focus group interview.

### 4.2.1. Gender stereotypes among the staff members

Staff members were conscious that, in addition to a traditional twofold concept of gender, there could also be something in between. When talking about gender roles, staff members automatically began to ponder gender roles only from the viewpoint of their own work and work community. Perceptions from their personal lives were not discussed at all. Non-gendered work tasks were justified also by the fact there are now many immigrant girls among the young people. Issues concerning the girls' sexuality and gender are discussed with a female staff member. However, it is precisely in solving violent situations that male staff members are preferred because of their physical strength. However, women have to be able to handle violent situations until the male staff members arrive. Men are also preferred for transferring and transporting young people.

The staff members had challenges to examine the girl's social gender as gender-sensitively and to see differences between the representatives of the same sex. Staff members considered that a gendered feature among the girls was their complexity, and generally, girls were felt to be more challenging than boys were. Girls' social relationships were thought to be difficult to track and clarify and girls are likely to act and talk behind each other's backs. However, staff members are aware that girls have begun to solve their social problems in ways similar to the

boys, by physical violence. However, according to the staff members, girls will go there only when the words run out or they are involved in a face-to-face situation.

#### 4.2.2. Experiences of violence among girls living in residential care units

At first, staff members defined violence as *actions towards others, contrary to their will, which can be mental, physical, or economic*. However, it was pointed out that many people could also experience violence, as it is socially and legally defined, though the individual may not necessarily notice the violence and mistreatment that he or she is experiencing.

According to staff members, girls have experienced most sexual violence. In addition, girls have also experienced physical violence, mental subjugation, and humiliation. The perpetrator is usually a boyfriend, or somebody from their inner circle. According to staff members, almost all of the girls have had experiences of relationships with older men, which would be classified in Finnish law as sexual abuse of a child. In other words, there is a massive difference between the ages and mental and physical maturity of the parties involved.

Overall, staff members thought that the girls' symptoms could appear in very diverse and individual ways. Experiences might appear as insecurity, but in other situations also as confidence. Common features were reacting in an unstable fashion, selecting people, and black and white thinking, but staff members are aware of the overall effects of intersectional features such as individual experiences, differences in temperament and background, etc. Girls often belittle the violence they have experienced, or do not even recognize it as violence. The solution model used by the girls is often based emphatically on violence, and the use of violence is seen as a solution. Harming themselves by cutting is the most common symptom shared by the girls.

During the discussions, the term “home bullied” came up; and this includes elements that also appear in residential care units. If a child has experienced and/or witnessed behaviour or harassment that crossed normal boundaries, the child was more ready to accept violence also from others. Young people do not necessarily form any limits about what is normal and what is not. Some girls might have problems in understanding other peoples' personal limits, so they might for example come physically very close to staff members. They do not recognize their own or others' limits.

Girls who have experienced sexual abuse do not always accept grown men in the role of educator. Girls might reject the men; they do not want them to be in the same company or perhaps even in the same space. The girl's experiences might appear in the form of overly sexual behaviour, which is directed specifically at the male staff members. Girls might try to base the interaction on flirtation and on provoking male staff members in order to get what they want. Girls might even develop a crush on male staff members. One male staff member thought that in those discussions it might be necessary to point out several times which subjects

they can talk about with men and which subjects it is more appropriate to discuss with female staff members. These subjects include menstruation and matters related to femininity.

According to staff members, violence within the residential care unit was a matter of quite infrequent individual cases. Violence is usually used by the girls and against the staff, and usually ends up with the girls being held in check. Violence usually begins in transit situations or when the movements of the girls are restricted.

Girls often try to behave according to their diagnoses. In other words, if a girl is labeled as violent, she will try to act according to her violent label. Staff members consider it important to deal with the girl herself rather than what she has done or what has been written about her.

#### 4.2.3. The situation and needs of staff members

The staff members in a residential care unit are often forced to consider whether they are educators, rehabilitators, or nurses. They believe that drawing a line between these different functions can be difficult, but there are fairly strict limits to the freedoms that they are allowed. The biggest challenges for the staff members are set by Finnish child protection law, which gives the professionals in the unit fewer opportunities to intervene and to educate the young person than would be available in home upbringing.

The spirit of the law is that there can be no restrictions. However, if there is something pernicious in the life of a young person, which might harm the young person's safety and development, it is possible to apply a restriction order. Staff members feel that it is impossible, for instance, to limit use of the Internet in cases where young people have to be given a mobile phone. Young people are able to use the internet, for example, by using a neighbour's wireless network.

However, dangerous situations can form before a restriction order has been given or even before the reason for the restriction order has been discovered. Staff members have, for example, faced a threat of violence coming from outside the residential care unit and the Internet has been crucial in bringing this about.

According to staff members, the girls are very aware of their legal rights. There have been periods when girls have maintained their rights strongly by contacting lawyers, who have then sent requests to staff members for responses on such subjects as: "gardening work is wrong". Staff members believe that they have to think carefully about what they can do or say. Girls appeal to clauses in law that do not necessarily even exist. There have also been legal accusations made against staff members concerning mental and physical violence against a young person. The charge of physical violence stemmed from restraint of a girl, while the charge of mental violence derived, according to the staff member, from the fact that "the young person concerned has probably experienced her upbringing here as mental violence".

Another challenge is law and instruction regarding tobacco. Staff members have to consider a young person's smoking according to three different sets of instructions: child welfare law, instructions from Valvira (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health), and tobacco law. Those three sets of instructions disagree with each other.

At the end of the day staff members think that it is especially the challenges of their work that makes the work so meaningful and holds them in the field. They have noted that people in general have a false notion of work in residential care units and they feel that they too have been given a certain kind of label because of their work. Quite often female staff members in particular are asked how they dare to work in such a place. A male worker found that his friends thought that he was “wrestling with the boys all day long”.

The whole idea behind work in a residential care unit is that the reasons for the young person's being taken into care will be resolved and the young person will be rehabilitated and integrated. Staff members try to see even the smallest progress by a young person as something very positive, which will help them also to cope better. Staff members can take delight in small things and find that there are lots of rewarding elements in their work. Overall, they think that there are more good elements in their work than poor ones.

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