

2nd to 5th October 2018

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**EUSARF 2018 PORTO**

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## Emotional and Behavioural Problems and Psychosocial Skills in Adolescents in Residential Care

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Thursday, 4th October @ 17:30: Poster Sessions & Coffee Break (Venue: Salão Nobre)

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**Background:** Several studies indicate a prevalence of mental health problems in adolescents who live in Residential Care (RC) when compared to adolescents living at home. Thus, it is essential to identify the psychosocial skills of adolescents in RC, since these act as protective factors.

**Objectives:** This study aims to compare adolescents in RC with adolescents from a national normative sample in relation to the frequency of mental health problems and psychosocial skills; identify differences related to the gender of adolescents in RC, and explore the relationship between mental health problems and psychosocial skills.

**Method:** 443 adolescents (50.1% female), aged 11 to 18 ( $M = 15.42$ ,  $SD = 2.33$ ) from 45 RC centres in Portugal participated in this study. Data were collected using the Youth Self-Report, which is a self-report questionnaire for adolescents, 11 to 18 years old, allowing for the assessment of their own psychosocial skills and emotional and behavioural problems in a standardized format. Sociodemographic data were collected from the Previous Information Survey (belonging to the Portuguese Comprehensive Quality Assessment System of Residential Care), which allows for sociodemographic, health and family information of adolescents in RC.

**Results:** Results showed that adolescents in RC tend to have higher levels of mental health problems (particularly girls), lower academic performance, more engagement in sports and hobbies, and in a greater number of domestic chores (with higher incidence in girls) and a poorer social support network when compared to adolescents living at home. There were significant negative correlations between adolescents' psychosocial skills and mental health problems. Skills such as sport and hobbies are negatively correlated with Rule-Breaking Behaviour and Externalizing Problems, indicating that these types of activities promote higher rates of well-being and resilience, reducing the probability of delinquent behaviours. Domestic chores were also negatively correlated with Rule-Breaking Behavior, Aggressive Behavior, Externalizing Problems and Total Problems. These results indicate that when adolescents are involved in "home" dynamics they tend to present less symptomatology. At a social level, it was possible to observe that the integration of adolescents in community organizations, as well as their interaction with other adolescents, reduce Withdrawn/Depressed feelings, allowing for the normalization of adolescents' life.

**Conclusions:** It is important to detect socio-cognitive resources and the needs of adolescents early, allowing for the implementation of socio-educational programmes of stimulation and self-enrichment. The results of this study highlight the importance of applying specific programmes to promote social skills as well as social support networks in order to minimize adolescents' emotional and behavioural problems. RC centres must be transformed into quality and safe environments for adolescents.