

Future Expectations of Adolescents Aging Out of Care in Brazil

Expectativas de futuro de los adolescentes que salen del cuidado institucional por edad en Brasil

Expectativas futuras de adolescentes que saem do acolhimento institucional por idade no Brasil

Luciana Cassarino-Perez

*Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Comunitária (GPPC), Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul
Grup de Recerca em Infància, Juventut i Comunitat (LIBERI), Universitat de Girona*

Carme Montserrat

Grup de Recerca em Infància, Juventut i Comunitat (LIBERI), Universitat de Girona

Jorge Castellà Sarriera

Grupo de Pesquisa em Psicologia Comunitária (GPPC), Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

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Abstract

Expectations for the future of adolescents aging out of care have a determinant influence on short and long-term outcomes. In Brazil, care leavers experience the transition to adult life largely unsupported. Therefore, we aimed to investigate the aspects that favor better future expectations of Brazilian adolescents who are aging out of care. The study participants were 190 male (55.8%) and female (44.2%) adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age ($M = 15.92$, $SD = 1.00$) from three Brazilian capitals. The discriminant analysis technique was used to identify profile characteristics that significantly distinguished two groups: adolescents with high and those

with low expectations for the future. The results reveal that (1) the aspect that most contributes to the increase in future expectations is the perceived social support, (2) the greater the readiness to leave care and the satisfaction with life, the better the future expectations, and (3) participating in an employment-assistance program brought down the adolescents' future expectations. These results point to the importance of preparation to leave care, combining instrumental support with socio-emotional support and considering the adolescents as the protagonists of their process and plans.

Keywords: Care leavers; residential care; child welfare; future expectations; social support.

Luciana Cassarino-Perez ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4075-2832>

Carme Montserrat ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5062-1903>

Jorge Castellà Sarriera ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8297-4957>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Luciana Cassarino-Perez, Ramiro Barcelos, 2600, sala 222. Santa Cecília, 90035-003, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Email: lucicaspe@gmail.com

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Resumen

Las expectativas futuras de los adolescentes que dejan los centros de acogida con 18 años tienen una influencia determinante en los resultados que alcanzarán a corto y largo plazo. En Brasil, la mayoría de jóvenes que salen de los centros de acogida con 18 años transitan a la edad adulta sin ningún tipo de apoyo. Por ello, en este artículo apuntamos a investigar los aspectos que favorecen mejores expectativas de futuro en adolescentes brasileños que están a punto de salir de los centros de acogida por haber llegado a la mayoría de edad. Los participantes del estudio fueron 190 adolescentes de ambos sexos (44.2% niñas y 55.8% niños), entre 14 y 18 años ($M = 15.92$, $DE = 1.00$), de tres ciudades capitales brasileñas. Se utilizó la técnica de análisis discriminante para identificar características de perfil que distinguieron significativamente dos grupos: adolescentes con altas expectativas y adolescentes con bajas expectativas de futuro. Los resultados revelan que (1) el aspecto que más contribuye al aumento de dichas expectativas es el apoyo social percibido, (2) cuanto mayor sea la percepción de preparación para dejar el centro de acogida y la satisfacción con la vida, mejores serán las expectativas, y (3) participar en un programa nacional de inserción laboral disminuye las expectativas de futuro de los adolescentes. Los resultados demuestran la importancia de preparar a estos jóvenes para la transición a la edad adulta, al combinar el apoyo instrumental con el socioemocional, y considerando a los adolescentes protagonistas de sus procesos y planes futuros.

Palabras clave: acogimiento residencial; adolescentes; transición a la vida adulta; expectativas futuras; apoyo social.

Resumo

As expectativas futuras dos adolescentes que saem dos centros de acolhimento aos 18 anos têm uma influência importante nos resultados alcançados por eles a curto e longo prazo. No Brasil, a maioria dos jovens que saem dos centros de acolhimento aos 18 anos transitam para a vida adulta sem nenhum tipo de apoio. Portanto, buscamos investigar quais aspectos favorecem melhores

perspectivas de futuro em adolescentes brasileiros que estão prestes a deixar os abrigos por já serem maiores de idade. Os participantes do estudo foram 190 adolescentes entre 14 e 18 anos ($M = 15.92$, $DP = 1.00$), de ambos os sexos (44.2% meninas e 55.8% meninos) de três capitais brasileiras. A técnica de análise discriminante foi utilizada para identificar características de perfil que distinguíssem significativamente dois grupos: adolescentes com altas expectativas para o futuro e adolescentes com baixas expectativas para o futuro. Os resultados revelam que: (1) o aspecto que mais contribui para o aumento das expectativas futuras é o suporte social percebido; (2) quanto maior a percepção de preparação para deixar o centro de acolhida e a satisfação com a vida, melhores são as expectativas futuras; e (3) participar de um programa nacional de colocação profissional reduz as expectativas dos adolescentes para o futuro. Esses resultados apontam para a importância de preparar esses jovens para a transição para a vida adulta, aliando o apoio instrumental ao apoio socioemocional e considerando os adolescentes como protagonistas de seus processos e planos futuros.

Palavras-chave: acolhimento residencial; adolescentes; transição para a vida adulta; expectativas futuras; suporte social.

Aging out of care in Brazil

Each year, a large group of Brazilian youth ages out of the protection system. In Brazil, institutionalization is a protective, exceptional, and extreme measure that should not extend beyond two years, except in legally provable situations of need (Brasil, 1990). In April 2020, 5 491 adolescents between 17 and 18 years of age were enrolled in the National Register of Children in Residential Care, representing 10% of the total number of children and adolescents in residential care in Brazil (Brasil, 2020). Without the possibility of returning to the family, these young people leave the institutions and start facing the challenges of autonomous adult life.

Through documents like the Child and Youth Statute and the Technical Guidance Manual for Care Services, Brazilian legislation establishes strengthening the adolescents' autonomy needs in the elaboration of their life project, using participatory methodologies that allow them to serve as protagonists (Brasil, 2008). Nevertheless, Brazilian studies appoint the youth's lack of preparation, as well as lack of follow-up during and after their aging out of care (De Souto, 2021; Dias & Silva, 2012; Rifiotis, 2019).

A complex range of domains, ranging from the adolescents' support network to their educational level, employability, issues related to housing, and independent life skills, permeates the transition process between residential care and adult life (FEPA, 2014; Scannapieco et al., 2007). The interaction between risk and protection factors involved in those areas will give rise to or reduce the possibility of overcoming adversities and achieving positive results after leaving care (Masten, 2001; Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2018; Yates & Grey, 2012).

Future expectations of adolescents in care

The aspects that serve as protective factors in the preparation of young people aging out of care include the goals and objectives they set in the medium and long term (Beal & Crockett, 2010), because thinking about the future motivates behavior and influences choices, decisions, and activities to be put into practice, reducing the distance between today and tomorrow (Locatelli et al., 2007). Over adolescence, ideas about the future tend to become more realistic and based on one's interests, abilities, and characteristics, as well as the opportunities being offered (Gottfredson, 1981). In late adolescence, the main concerns and future interests usually refer to studies and work, followed by marriage, making a family, leisure activities, and material goods (Nurmi, 1991).

It would be natural to assume that children and adolescents in residential care, whose stories invariably involve risk, have more pessimistic expectations about the future than the general population. Studies indicate that the future expectations of adolescents in residential care tend to be optimistic and do not differ much in intensity from those of peers without a history of institutionalization (Bengtsson et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2014; Sulimani-Aidan, 2015; Zappe et al., 2013). On the other hand, the high future expectations of young people in residential care in Brazil are more focused on interpersonal relationships, housing, and social recognition (Ferreira et al., 2014; Zappe et al., 2013), as opposed to the main interests of adolescents in the general population, such as the continuity of studies and employability (Nurmi, 1991).

Little research has been done on the relationship between the future expectations of adolescents in residential care and the results after aging out. A longitudinal study found positive correlations between higher future expectations in adolescence and satisfaction with housing and socioeconomic and educational level in adulthood after the dismissal from the protection system (Sulimani-Aidan, 2015). In the context of vulnerable adolescents, several studies suggest links between optimistic future expectations and positive psychosocial outcomes, resilience, and lower incidence of risk behaviors in adulthood (Bond & Van Breda, 2018; Brumley et al., 2017).

Social support and life satisfaction while in care

The discovery of the role future expectations play in adolescents' development, as well as in the transition to adulthood, raises the question: which factors contribute to their increase? Among the aspects recently appointed in the literature as influencers of future expectations, social support stands out. The social support network is characterized

as the set of systems and significant people that make up the relationships the subject receives and perceives (Brito & Koller, 1999). In any context, social support and affective bonds are essential for ecological transition processes throughout the development (Poletto & Koller, 2008).

In the specific context of the transition between residential care and adult life, Sulimani-Aidan and Benbenishty (2011) investigated the relationship between social support and future expectations; they identified positive correlations between these expectations and the support of mothers and peers. In a qualitative study involving 71 graduates, van Audenhove and Vander Leanen (2017) identified that informal and mutual interpersonal relationships between young people and their peers, relatives, or partners are essential for future expectations than relationships with professionals. Other studies with adolescents from different contexts have also demonstrated the positive effect of these sources of social support on future expectations (Ali et al., 2005; Clinkinbeard & Murray, 2012; McCoy & Bowen, 2015; Seginer & Shoyer, 2012).

Satisfaction with life is part of the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being and is closely related to the quality of life (Galíndez & Casas, 2010). The individual evaluation of this construct can be based on specific domains of life—health, interpersonal relationships, security, etc.—or as a global judgment (Diener, 2000). The literature on the subject has evidenced the protective effect of being satisfied with life on adolescents' development due to its mediating role between stressful life events and their possible consequences (McKnight et al., 2002; Suldo & Huebner, 2004).

Several recent studies have investigated children and adolescents' satisfaction with life in residential care compared to that of adolescents and children who live with their families. The results revealed that, in Brazil and in other countries, the satisfaction with life of those in residential care is lower—this difference has been insignificant in some studies— (Llosada-Gistau et al., 2015;

Schutz et al., 2015), which could put the adolescents in residential care at a disadvantage also concerning established plans and goals as, in adolescents who live with their families, high rates of satisfaction with life influence the increase of expectations for the future (Proctor et al., 2010).

Readiness to leave care

The importance of assessing how prepared adolescents feel to age out of care is evident given the vast literature addressing the difficulties they face in areas such as work, housing, financial resources, and daily living, among others (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2021; Dinisman & Zeira, 2011). Recent studies on readiness to leave care are based on the model of Maluccio et al. (1990), which understands the variable as the ability of young people to provide for their own needs, feel good about themselves, and be satisfied with the relationships established with their families, community, and society in general. The model also proposes that to conquer these conditions, young people need two types of skills: tangible—e. g., how to find a place to live—and intangible—e. g., how to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships—. Both domains would be essential for a successful transition process, favoring the integration of young adults into society (Cook & Ansell, 1986). In this study, the readiness to leave care is examined through the young people's subjective perceptions of their abilities to perform a series of both tangible and intangible tasks (Dinisman, 2016).

The relationship between the perceived readiness to perform independent life tasks and the future expectations of adolescents in residential care has not been the focus of recent studies. Nevertheless, studies have already proven the positive effect of the readiness of young people on their adjustment and the achievement of positive results after they leave care (Cook & Ansell, 1986; Dinisman, 2016; Maluccio et al., 1990). Israeli researchers

conducted a series of studies on this theme and revealed the relationship between readiness and other fundamental aspects such as social support (Benbenishty & Schiff, 2009; Dinisman, 2016; Dinisman & Zeira, 2011), education goals (Zeira et al., 2019), and global satisfaction with life (Dinisman, 2016).

Objectives

Considering that future expectations play a determinant role in the transition process to adult life and given the lack of research on this topic in Brazil, the main objective was to build a distinctive profile aiming to understand the high and low future expectations of Brazilian adolescents aging out of care. Knowing the aspects that favor higher future expectations makes it possible to enhance them so these adolescents can set and achieve goals in the future.

Methods

Participants

The study included 190 male (55.8%) and female (44.2%) adolescents aged between 14 and 18 years ($M = 15.92$, $SD = 1.00$) who lived in residential care institutions in the cities of Curitiba (28.4%), Porto Alegre (58.9%), and São Paulo (12.6%). The inclusion criteria to participate in the study were (1) age between 14 and 18 years, (2) being in residential care for at least six months, (3) proper understanding of the research instrument, and (4) being in the process of aging out of care—adolescents 15 years of age or younger—. The age-related inclusion criteria were formulated considering that, according to Brazilian legislation, adolescents over 14 can work as apprentices that, when institutionalized, should receive preparation for an autonomous life. Convenience sampling

was used; the leaders of the care facilities in the three cities indicated the participants.

Instruments

Sociodemographic data, such as age, sex, composition, contact with the biological family, length of stay at the care facility, education, and participation in extracurricular activities, were collected through a 22-item questionnaire developed for this study.

Future expectations were assessed through the Brazilian Portuguese version of the Perceived Life Chances Scale (Jessor et al., 1990), adapted by Gunther and Gunther (1998). This self-report instrument consists of eleven items in which the participants refer to their chances of finishing high school in the future, accessing higher education, and having their own house and happy family life, among other aspects. The answers are offered on a Likert scale ranging from 1—very low—to 5—very high—. The scale score is computed by adding up the item scores and can range between 11 and 55 points.

To measure the adolescents' perceived social support, the Brazilian version of Social Support Appraisals (Vaux et al., 1986, adapted for Brazil by Squassoni & Matsukura, 2014) was used. In this 30-item Likert format scale, the participants are expected to evaluate phrases about their support network, ranging from “totally agree” to “totally disagree.” The sum of the item scores gives the total score of each subscale—friends, family, teachers, and others—, and the sum of the subscale scores reveals the total perceived social support score.

Two measures of satisfaction with life were also used: The Personal Well-Being Index - School Children—PWI-SC—(Cummins & Lau, 2005) and the Student Life Satisfaction Scale—SLSS—(Huebner, 1991). The PWI-SC assesses satisfaction with various areas of life through seven items that refer to health, the standard of living, life achievement, personal safety, future security, personal

relationships, and community connectedness. The seven items are assessed on an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from completely dissatisfied (0) to completely satisfied (10). The SLSS also consists of seven items but uses five-point scales—from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”—to refer to the overall satisfaction with life.

Finally, the perceived readiness to leave care was investigated using a questionnaire specifically built for this study, based on the Readiness to Leave Care tool (Benbenishty & Schiff, 2009). The questionnaire consists of 36 questions starting with the statement: “When I leave residential care, I believe I will be able to...”. The answers were provided on a five-point scale, ranging from 1—I strongly disagree—to 5—I strongly agree—. The questions were divided into the following themes: work—e. g., “finding a job and participating in interviews”—, housing—e. g., “finding a place to live”—, activities of daily living—e. g., “preparing my meals”—, interpersonal relationships—e. g., “giving and receiving affection from a partner”—, risky behaviors—e. g., “avoiding alcohol abuse”—, lifestyle—e. g., “playing sports”—. Before data collection, a semantic pilot was performed to verify the understanding of the items, involving eight adolescents selected following the same criteria as the study sample.

Ethical issues

The Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul approved the study under opinion 1534918. After the approval, the organizations responsible for authorizing the research were contacted. When the service coordinator’s consent was obtained, previously scheduled visits took place, during which the adolescents were invited to participate in the research and signed an Informed Consent Form. The tool was applied individually in a private room inside the residential care facilities. On average, the application took 20 minutes.

Data analysis

Initially, descriptive analyses were performed to examine the sample characteristics and the results of the future expectation scale. Subsequently, the data were evaluated using multivariate analysis to identify profile characteristics that significantly distinguished two groups: adolescents with high expectations for the future and adolescents with low expectations for the future. We applied the discriminant analysis, a statistical procedure that classifies unknown individuals and the probability of their classification into a certain group. To obtain greater differentiation between the groups and increase the discriminant power, we chose to divide the total sample ($N = 190$) into three parts, based on the scores of the future expectation scale, using the percentages 40 and 60 as cutoff points. The first group (G1) included the 40% with the lowest scores, the second group (G2) comprised the 40% with the highest scores, and the remaining 20% with average scores were excluded. Therefore, in the multivariate analysis stage, the sample consisted of 152 valid cases, 70 cases in G1—adolescents with low expectations for the future—and 82 cases in G2—adolescents with high expectations for the future—. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software version 20.

Results

Descriptive analyses indicated that 62.6% of the participants were in the age group between 16 and 18 years of age and 37.4% were between 14 and 15. Of the total sample, 44.2% were girls. 70.1% had already experienced at least one change of care facility, and 65.8% had been in residential care for more than two years. 43.7% of the adolescents had no contact with their biological families, and 39.5% were receiving training from the government’s employment assistance program (Programa Jovem Aprendiz, PJA).

The future expectation scale had an internal consistency ratio of 0.804 and a total average of 39.70, ranging from 11 to 55 points. The mean item scores are shown in Table 1. The highest mean was related to the expectation of having a house of their own, followed by the expectation of having a happy family life and friends for support. The lowest expectations for the future were to enter university, be respected in their community, be happy to live in Brazil, and that the country's leaders will be trustworthy in the future. The latter obtained the lowest average score and was the only item that scored below three points.

Discriminant analysis was used to know the relevant variables to distinguish two groups of

adolescents in residential care with higher and lower scores on the future expectation scale. The function explains 100% of the variability between G1 and G2, with a moderate canonical correlation of 0.650. The eigenvalue was 0.732. Based on the Wilks Lambda coefficient, we can infer that the function explains 42.3% of the existing variance (1 – Wilks). The function had a good predictive ability, correctly classifying 80.9% of cases (Table 2). The group with low future expectations presented a centroid of -0.785 against 0.920 in the group with high future expectations. The centroids reveal the situation of each group (high and low expectations), indicating their position in relation to the function found.

Table 1
Mean future expectations

Future expectations	M	SD
Concluding secondary education	3.85	1.15
Accessing postsecondary education	3.37	1.27
Having a job that will guarantee my quality of life	3.89	1.02
Having my own house	4.11	1.01
Having a job that will give me satisfaction	3.89	1.09
Having a happy family life	3.98	1.13
Staying healthy most of the time	3.87	1.12
Being happy to live in Brazil	3.15	1.36
The Brazilian leaders will be trustworthy	2.05	1.19
Being respected by my community	3.56	1.07
Having friends for support	3.98	1.11

Table 2
Group classification in discriminant analysis: High and low expectations for the future

Group classification	High future expectation	Low future expectation	Total
High future expectation	63 (76.8%)	19 (23.2%)	82
Low future expectation	10 (14.3%)	60 (85.7%)	70

Note. Of the original cases, 80.9% were grouped correctly.

Analyzing the function based on the discriminating variables with a minimum cut-off value of 0.20 in the structural matrix, it was identified that the variable that most contributes to distinguishing groups G1 and G2 is the adolescents' perception of their support network (.650), as shown in Table 3. The centroid loadings allowed us to infer that this discrimination occurs in the sense of G2: the higher the perceived support network, the better the expectations for the future. Subjective well-being also significantly differentiated the two groups towards the group with higher expectations with discriminant loadings superior to 0.3 for the two scales used.

Another aspect that significantly distinguishes the groups, in favor of those with higher expectations with loadings varying between .240 and .557, is how ready the adolescents feel to age out of care. The variables of readiness to leave care that most distinguished the two groups are associated primarily with the dimension of work —feeling

capable of finding a job and having a job in the area of interest—, followed by housing —feeling capable of finding a place to live and predicting housing costs—, risk behaviors —feeling capable of avoiding risky behavior and drug abuse—, and interpersonal relationships —feeling capable of having friends who value him/her—. Another significant variable that contributed to distinguishing between the groups was the participation in the PJA, which was the only one to distinguish the group with the lowest future expectations.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that most of the adolescents had been in residential care for more than two years, having experienced at least one change of care facility. Their highest future expectations were related to housing and interpersonal relationships, while the lowest expectations

Table 3
Discriminative contribution of the variables in the structural matrix

Variables in the structural matrix	Function 1
Total SSA	.650
Finding a job ^a	.557
Having a job in one's area of interest ^a	.426
Finding housing ^a	.409
Total SLSS	.403
Avoiding violent behavior ^a	.369
Total PWI	.332
Predicting housing costs ^a	.316
Have friends who value you ^a	.308
Avoiding drugs abuse ^a	.270
Receiving training by the PJA	-.269
Planning my future ^a	.262
Giving and getting affection from a partner ^a	.240

Note. ^a Items referring to the readiness to leave care questionnaire “When leaving the residential care, I believe I will be capable of...”.

were related to the political future of the country. Concerning the research's main objective, the construction of a distinctive profile to understand the high and low expectations for the future, the study revealed that (1) the aspect that determines the increase future expectations is the perceived social support, (2) the greater the readiness to leave care and the satisfaction with life, the better the future expectations, and (3) doing an internship or participating in the PJA lowers the investigated adolescents' future expectations.

In line with earlier studies, in general, the adolescents have good expectations for the future, presenting mean scores close to the score corresponding to "high expectations" in seven of the eleven items evaluated (Bengtsson et al., 2018; Sulimani-Aidan, 2015; Sulimani-Aidan & Benbenishty, 2011; Zappe et al., 2013). Using the same instrument as this study to evaluate the future expectations of Brazilian adolescents in residential care, Zappe et al. (2013) also identified building a family and having friends for support among the highest expectations. This result reveals the intention of repairing affective bonds, impaired along trajectories permeated by risk (Zappe et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the higher expectations related to social support in this population could mean that higher expectations are aimed at goals that depend on individual effort and personal characteristics rather than on opportunities democratically offered through public policies. The high scores for the expectation of having a house, as opposed to the low expectations of having a job that offers personal satisfaction and accessing higher education, also point in that direction. Previous studies with Brazilian vulnerable youth have also identified emphasis on individual effort even when pursuing educational and professional goals (Ambrosini & Escott, 2019; Barbosa, 2022). Young people react to the precariousness of public resources according to their possibilities and coping strategies, which reinforces the need for democratic access to opportunities (Matheus, 2019).

Especially concerning the expectations of finishing high school and accessing postsecondary education, it is noteworthy that these rank among the lowest expectations. This result is worrying, given the importance of the objectives of pursuing education to face the various challenges related to autonomous life. Research in different countries found a low rate of young people with a residential care history accessing and completing higher education (Gilligan & Brady, 2022; MacNamara et al., 2019) and alert that aspiring to a higher education degree will grant the adolescent better chances of accessing college and feeling satisfied with other areas of life after leaving residential care (Beal & Crocket, 2010; Sulimani-Aidan, 2015).

The low expectations related to Brazil's political future also confirm the assumption that, for those aspirations that depend on factors that go beyond individual merit, the results tend to be worse. We could attribute the low scores to the fact that data collection took place at a time when corruption scandals were widely publicized by the media. However, the discontent of Brazilian youth with the political scenario of the country is a reality that surveys have pointed out for some years (Brazil, 2013; Corrêa & Souza, 2015). These studies also reveal that, linked to hopelessness and distrust, young people are passive towards politics. The authors believe that this phenomenon is the result of a private order political socialization, which does not consider the contribution of youth to the decisions of community life. Its consequences include the ideology of individual hope based on their own qualifications and personal effort (Corrêa & Souza, 2015; De Castro, 2010; Tomizaki & Daniliauskas, 2018).

Although the descriptive results reveal the tendency of adolescents to better evaluate the expectations that depend more on their efforts, in the multivariate analyses, the aspect that most differentiated those with high from those with low expectations was social support. This variable

significantly influenced the result of the entire scale, that is, of the most individual expectations as well as those related to the different systems the adolescent takes part in—school, care facility, social care network, economic and political context, etc.—. The central role of support from family, peers, teachers, and other sources in enhancing the aspirations for the future of adolescents in care has already been widely proven (Ali et al., 2005; Clinkinbeard & Murray, 2012; McCoy & Bowen, 2015; Seginer & Shoyer, 2012).

To formulate and strengthen these individual plans and favor their achievement, it is paramount to encourage and promote intimate, safe, and committed connections between young people and positive adult role models (Arnau-Sabatés & Gilligan, 2020; Bond & Van Breda, 2018). Nevertheless, establishing high-quality intimate relationships involves time and individual dedication, aspects that are hardly part of the reality of Brazilian adolescents about to leave the protection system. In this sense, programs that promote connections between adolescents and mentors have been gaining strength as a potential social support strategy with several positive results (Arnau-Sabatés & Gilligan, 2020; Sulimani-Aidan, 2018).

If social support proved to be essential for the expectations, the perceived readiness to leave care also seems to exert an important influence in this relationship. Feeling capable of performing tangible tasks, such as finding and maintaining a place to live, figures among the aspects that characterize individuals with higher expectations for the future. Similarly, intangible skills such as establishing bonds of friendship are also important for this process. These results reinforce the model of readiness to leave care in which tangible and intangible skills are fundamental for a transition process that favors the integration of young adults into society (Cook & Ansell, 1986; Maluccio et al., 1990), in addition to endorsing the central role of the future expectations in this process (Sulimani-Aidan & Benbenishty, 2011).

Another interesting aspect the descriptive and multivariate results present in common is the important role of housing and affective bonding variables in the adolescents' responses. These two aspects contain the main ruptures all of the study participants experience as the cause or the result of being placed in care facilities. The special role of these aspects in future expectations reinforces the finding that repairing the losses these adolescents experience is their main developmental task (Zappe et al., 2013).

The possibility of overcoming risk situations experienced along the trajectories lived can also explain the central role of satisfaction with life, whether global or with different domains, for the increase in future expectations. The results confirm satisfaction with life as an important protective factor and reveal the need to favor this aspect (McKnight et al., 2002; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). As a protective measure, the placement in residential care needs to contribute to the enhancement of the adolescents' satisfaction with life, increasing life expectations and supporting youth to overcome the adversities experienced thus far.

The variables of perceived ability to perform a given task and satisfaction with life had already been pointed out in the literature as predictors of future expectations (McCoy & Bowen, 2015; Verdugo et al., 2018). The choice to plan and carry out a particular activity is directly related to the belief in the ability to achieve it and the satisfaction resulting from the experience of having achieved the goals set (García-Viniegras, 2005). However, this movement does not occur in a void, it is subordinated to a context and the restrictions or possibilities imposed by the environment the adolescent lives in will also influence the selection of a certain goal or objective (Verdugo et al., 2018). This would explain why the adolescents in residential care have lower expectations of accessing postsecondary education in a context in which support given does not encourages pursuing higher education goals and aging out of care requires finding a job immediately.

Concerning this domain, it is interesting to note that the more prepared the adolescents feel to find a job, the higher their expectations for the future. On the other hand, participating in employment assistance programs does not increase their expectations for the future. The employment assistance received by the population investigated in this study mainly occurs through participation in the PJA offered by the government. The PJA was established based on a law that guarantees the hiring, by medium and large companies, of young people aged between 14 and 24 years as apprentices (Brazil, 2000). This is a professionalization policy that provides for companies to offer technical and practical training. Its target audience is mainly young people in vulnerable contexts, although the policy does not include any specific guidelines regarding the population in residential care. The operationalization of the PJA has been questioned in studies whose results reveal flaws, such as the disconnection between the training received and the actual living conditions of young people (Freitas & Oliveira, 2012) and the disregard of young people's perception of their learning process and their capacity for reflection and critical positioning (Alves & Albanese, 2016).

The need to restructure the way employment assistance is offered would justify the results obtained in this study, as the adolescents in technical-vocational training would be expected to be more future-oriented. Furthermore, it is highlighted not only regarding the existing Brazilian policies but also to set up new programs focused on the actual living conditions of young people who are about to leave the protection system. Assessments of existing policies in several countries prove the need and effectiveness of instrumental and social support services to increase the future expectations and, consequently, the quality of life of youth aging out of care (Montserrat et al., 2011; Okpych, 2012).

Conclusion

Based on the premise that future expectations play a fundamental role in the achievement of future goals, this study points out the aspects that can favor their enhancement. The first is that bonding with positive adult role models and peers is essential to favor the future plans and achievements of adolescents who are aging out of care. The influence of instrumental support in the pre-transition phase on the youth's future expectations is also evidenced. Adolescents in care need to feel able to plan and face the future beyond the protection system, whether it means preparing to find a job, carrying out activities of daily living, or coping with risky situations. In that sense, we highlight the importance of complementarity between the programs designed to develop independent life skills and the emotional support offered to care leavers.

The results obtained also contribute to the understanding of how the aspects that favor the improvement in future expectations can be fostered in the context of residential care. It is important for researchers, policy-makers, and professionals in the protection system to address the following issues: (1) the starting point to promote the future of the youth aging out of care is their motivation to change their situation of vulnerability, (re)building homes and affective bonds, (2) programs targeting this population need to consider the youth as protagonists of their lives and future plans, and (3) it is up to care providers, in addition to providing instrumental support, to ensure the follow-up and awareness-raising of youth's relationships with the community.

This study is part of a still incipient field in Brazilian research, entailing some limitations. The first refers to the sample size and convenience sampling, which restricts the representativeness of the country's reality. This limitation partially derives from the lengthy and bureaucratic authorization

process to access the research participants. Another limitation was the lack of instruments to evaluate different aspects of the transition to adulthood that have been validated for the Brazilian population. Future studies can seek alternatives to overcome these limitations and invest in longitudinal designs that offer greater contributions regarding how future expectations in care leavers impact their short and long-term outcomes.

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