Repression in Residential Youth Care

The inevitable dark side of secure care?

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Staff is expected to interpret youth’s behavior from two perspectives:

- Care / treatment
- Safety / Control

Tools of staff: e.g. Power, structure, and coercion
These aspects can become repressive

Repression is characterized by an authority figure intentionally acting in a way that harms the youth, or by an authority figure unlawfully or arbitrarily depriving the youth of liberty or autonomy.

As a consequence...

• Arbitrary use of power, structure and coercion causes youth to experience staff’s acting as unpredictable, unfair and unsafe
  → reactance (aggression, demotivation, stress)

• Youth’s problems are getting worse instead of getting better

• Children’s rights are violated

• But also: consequences for staff (demotivation, stress)
Underlying processes
(social psychological perspective)

Intrapersonal processes:
- Fear of aggression
- Dehumanization by (mental) distance between youth and staff
- Rationalization

Interpersonal processes:
- Identification with repressive team leader
- Permissive ethical climate
- Socialization with repressive team
Underlying processes (organizational perspective)

- Organizational approach → punishment versus treatment
- Organizational structure (hierarchy)
- Person Environment Fit
- Staff selection
- Institutionalization → repression as routine
Examples

• Invasive forms of observation (camera’s, limited moving, following, tapping phone conversations)
• High amount of rules
• Standardized punishment
• Non reflexive team
• Unlawful use of coercive measures
• Etc.
No quick fix

- Supervision and role models
- Transformational leaders: inspiring and innovative
- Discussing ethical dilemma’s
- Talking about feelings of fear and unsafety
- Selection and training of staff
- REFLECTION