

The opinion of young people who have committed violent child-to-parent crimes on factors that enhance and limit youth empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of the life stories and answers to questionnaires of young people who have served the judicial sentence of living in an open regime educational group in Catalonia for crimes of child-to-parent violence. The analysis identifies the spaces, moments and processes that the participants considered to enhance or limit empowerment. The research concludes that this judicial sentence favours the development of empowering personal skills, such as self-esteem or responsibility. The article ends with a series of reflections on how to compensate for the limiting factors identified and, as a consequence, how to improve future socio-educational interaction.

1. Introduction

Abuse of family members in the form of violence exercised by minors or young people towards their parents is one of the crimes to have increased most in recent years. According to [Martínez, Estévez, Jiménez, and Velilla \(2015\)](#), child-parent violence is perpetrated by between 10% and 18% of young people at the international level, with national figures of 3.1% physical abuse and 12.9% psychological abuse. This means that complaints filed by mothers and fathers abused by their sons or daughters have increased both internationally and nationally. In Catalonia, for example, the number of young people reported for crimes of child-parent violence grew by 14% between 2011 and 2017 ([Departament de Justícia, 2018a](#)). In response to this, different intervention programmes have emerged to address child-parent violence from a psychoeducational and/or behavioural perspective ([Ibabe, Arnosó, & Elgorriaga, 2018](#)). These programmes generally aim to redirect and consolidate good practices in relation to education, relations and coexistence free from any type of violence, and seek to involve both the young person and their family in the rehabilitation and social reintegration process.

At an international level, among others it is worth highlighting the Step-Up Program Curriculum: Building Respectful Family Relationships, which applies restorative practice methods aimed at generating awareness and understanding, as well as developing empathy and responsibility ([Anderson & Routt, 2004](#)); the Break4Change Programme Responding to Child to Parent Violence, which seeks to help control

frustration and improve communication skills, among other goals ([Brak4Change Partnership, 2015](#)); and the programme Non Violent Resistance Handbook for Practitioners: Responding to Child to Parent Violence in Practice, which focuses more on offering support to parents, providing them with techniques for bonding, resistance and reconciliation with their children ([Coogan & Lauster, 2015](#)).

At the national level, different programmes and measures address this problem, such as the Educational and Therapeutic Treatment for Abuse Towards Parents programme, which fosters cross-disciplinary work on aspects such as motivation, cognitions involved in the aggression and emotions in order to strengthen and promote a stable and lasting change process ([González, García-Vera, Graña, Morán, Gesteira, Fernández, & Zapardiel, 2013](#)) or coexistence in an educational group. Participation in an educational group is an open-regime sentence laid out in ([Ley Orgánica 5/2000, de 12 de enero, reguladora de la responsabilidad penal de los menores, BOE 11, 2012](#)) pertaining to the Spanish youth justice system. It has been implemented over the years in various autonomous regions of the Spanish state, among them the Autonomous Regions of Madrid, Andalusia, the Basque Country, Murcia and Catalonia. Its main objective is to address crimes of child-to-parent violence. Some of these autonomous regions manage this judicial sentence through the private sector or other entities, foundations or associations; in other cases, it is managed directly by the local government.

In Catalonia, the creation of units specialized in this type of crime was an immediate necessity because, according to the [Departament de Justícia \(2018a\)](#), child-to-parent violence was on the increase. But what

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does the application of this judicial measure entail? It obliges the young person to live in a context that is different from what they are used to, specifically in an educational group, cared for by educators and psychologists, for a period of time that normally ranges from 6 to 9 months. The aims of these educational groups are: (1) to provide a therapeutic and socio-educational learning context; (2) to offer a positive socialization environment and an alternative form of cohabitation without violence; and (3) to facilitate an improved relationship between young people and their families. These are spaces where young people must engage in daily activities such as going shopping or doing leisure activities, as far as possible within a framework of normality (these include going for a walk, going on excursions, going to cultural shows, meeting friends, etc.). They ensure young people's participation in and attendance at training, sports and leisure events according to their age and needs. They also offer educational tutoring and psychological therapy (Centre d'Estudis Jurídics i Formació Especialitzada, 2018; Departament de Justícia, 2017, 2018b).

The above constitutes a judicial sentence within the legal youth justice framework. Participation in the programme is conceived as a differentiated and individualized treatment, with a multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach, which should favour the integration and rehabilitation of young people who have received the sentence. Although empowerment is not explicitly mentioned, the main facets and attributes that represent this challenge are (self-esteem, responsibility, critical capacity or participation). As a starting point, we will take the following definition of empowerment:

[It is a] process which increases the possibilities that a person will make decisions and act in a coherent way with regards to everything that affects their own life and participate in the decision-making process and engage in their own community in a sharing and responsible manner. This requires two conditions: that the person acquires and develops a series of personal skills (knowledge, attitudes, aptitudes, abilities...) and that their environment allows them to put these skills into practice (Soler, Trilla, Jiménez-Morales, & Úcar, 2017, p. 22).

Where, how and when can empowerment be promoted? The HEBE Project provides a model with which to describe, explain and interpret youth empowerment through the identification of significant spaces, agents, moments and processes in this respect (Soler et al., 2017; Llena-Berñe, Agud-Morell, Páez de la Torre, & Vila-Mumbrú, 2017). Spaces are identified with contexts or areas in which the interactions that take place promote the empowerment of young people. This means institutionalized spaces such as formal educational environments (e.g. schools), informal and social education environments (e.g. civic centres), non-institutionalized spaces such as public citizen environments (squares, parks, etc.) and other spaces such as the family or work environment, for example. Personal empowerment agents are found in these spaces, including relatives, friends or educators. Moments, on the other hand, can be associated with temporal segments of daily life that favour empowerment. In this sense, it is worth noting the different stages of the life cycle (e.g. youth), critical incidents or exceptional or specific experiences (e.g. being unemployed) and social and collective periods (e.g. times of economic crisis). And finally, processes, which, according to the aforementioned authors, are linked to methods, systems or the application of techniques that promote and facilitate youth empowerment on three possible levels: macro, meso and micro. At the macro level, empowerment can take place through public and youth policies; at the meso level, through groups and institutions (for example, open programmes that stimulate freedom and creativity); and at the micro level, through attitudes or ways of behaving.

Little is found in the literature on empowering young people in the youth justice system, perhaps because the concept of power is explicit within empowerment, and this, in turn, is related to the idea of authority, dominance or influence. In this sense, the justice system

supposes that the right thing to do in judicial measures is to deprive people of power. However, important studies have demonstrated the relevance of this issue. Zettler (2021) states that any intervention aimed at ensuring the empowerment of personnel and young people who participate in the justice system leads to a reduction in bad behaviour and violence in youth centres. Furthermore, Elwyn, Esaki, and Smith (2015) have noted that empowering intervention provides safer and more therapeutic environments in youth justice centres. Rahmi (2015) showed that youth empowerment in these settings is essential in helping young people develop morals, think accordingly and become aware of their responsibilities.

That being said, however, the youth justice system is not normally analysed from this perspective, and even less so when it comes to addressing issues of child-to-parent violence. In the case at hand, these are young people who have shown some type of violence (psychological, physical...) to assert power and control over their parents (Aroca-Montolío, Lorenzo-Moledo, & Miró-Pérez, 2014). It is interesting, therefore, that judicial sentences reduce, rather than enhance, the "power" to achieve control and to redirect the conflict that arises in the framework of coexistence, the aim of this being to have controllable and governable individuals (Foucault, 1993). This often makes educational work very difficult or even impossible to carry out. Thus, social movements and power dynamics make education an element of conflict and struggle (Apple, 2015). But what is it we wish to prioritize? Education or control? How do we learn to manage freedom? Through responsibility or through power?

The protocol for regulatory participation in educational groups is psycho-educational in nature, and can and should therefore favour enhancement and reinforcement programmes, in short, empowerment programmes, since it is a judicial sentence designed to improve the personal development of young people, fostering their engagement with society (Wagaman, 2011). The programmes should work on the use of practical and functional power for living and coexisting in society, defining actions and objectives aimed at knowing how to control intellectual resources (knowledge, information and ideas) and mastering sufficient skills to facilitate, communicate and maintain certain beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours (Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton, & Bird, 2009; Ruiz-Bravo, Vargas, & Clausen, 2018).

2. Objective

In order to assess the impact of participation in the programme and the treatment implemented by the team of professionals of the educational groups in Catalonia, a study of the empowering activities, tasks and practices carried out in the two Catalan educational groups was proposed.

The idea was to generate knowledge about the factors that enable and limit the empowerment of young people on these programmes within the framework of the Catalan youth justice system. The purpose was to identify those factors that, according to the young people who use these services, favour or hinder the consolidation of learning and skills for their personal growth, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the experiences of young people who have been users of these services and generate theory based on these (Guetterman, Babchuk, Howell Smith, & Stevens, 2019), two methodological strategies have been applied: the life story and the questionnaire. This investigation therefore uses a mixed methodology. One of the predominant research models on which this mixed methodology has been based is grounded theory. The model is applied to the research as a whole since the design, field work, analysis and interpretation of the data have been done simultaneously and jointly in order to interpret and contextualize each of the research advances.

3.1. Life stories

The aim of the *life story* method is to understand and map young people's memories, perceptions, relationships, aspirations and signs of repentance with relation to their choices, behaviour or the circumstances that have led to them becoming caught up in the youth justice system (Davies, Singh, Tebboth, Spear, Mensah, & Ansah, 2018). Employing this method gave young people who have completed the sentence of coexistence in an educational group in Catalonia in a specific year the opportunity to evaluate their passage through the youth justice system in terms of empowerment. Catalonia currently has two mixed educational groups with 5 or 6 places – so the group total was 10 to 12 young people. In this study, it was possible to complete N = 5 life stories, which is a sizeable group in relation to the total. The life stories were taken from males aged between 17 and 19, two who completed their sentence in educational group A and the other three in educational group B.

The young people were selected according to the intentional non-probability sampling method (Otzen & Manterola, 2017), taking into account the following criteria: (a) the educational group in which the judicial sentence is carried out, (b) how long they participated in the educational group and, (c) the predisposition of the young person to carry out the interviews or their availability in terms of time and place (Bertaux, 1980; Rodríguez, Gil, & García, 1996). Each of the young people received the relevant information about this research and signed the informed consent form beforehand - they therefore participated with all the pertinent ethical guarantees. In the case of minors, the consent of their legal guardians was also requested.

To complete the life stories, a researcher external to the analysed centres held an initial informal meeting with each young person in order to ascertain their personal history prior to entering the centre. A script of questions was designed to guide the conversation if required. The script used some of the youth empowerment dimensions included in the HEBE Project, and was validated by experts from the field of youth empowerment and the youth justice system. In this first meeting, the external researcher asked about problems or situations experienced by the young people that led them to commit the crime. This gave the researcher a starting point to be able to later initiate two more in-depth interviews. In each of these, the researcher reminded the young people of what they had said in the first interview in order that they might reflect on their own words and assess the impact that their passage through the centre had had on them. The first interview was conducted during their final days with the educational group, and the second three or four months later. Each interview lasted from one to one-and-a-half hours on average. The *board game Dixit*¹ was used to facilitate a fluid and meaningful story for the investigation (Roubira, 2008). The cards used in this educational game have artistically ambiguous images, which activate the senses, leading to the association of ideas, lateral thinking and the creative construction of the story itself (de la Juventud, 2017). Before starting each interview, the external researcher showed the young people 26 cards. They then had to choose one of these to answer the following question: *Which card best represents your current personal situation? Why?*

In choosing the card and answering this question, the young people were invited to reflect on everything they experienced and perceived through their five senses (sounds, images, smells, tastes, gestures) (Rouby, Fournel, & Bensafi, 2016). The senses were used as a pedagogical strategy to encourage them to come out of their inner self and relate to their surroundings (Santamaría, 2017).

Following the narrative logic of the discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006), at the end they were asked to assess the impact their time in the

educational group had had on them.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed within 72 h by the same external researcher who had conducted them.

3.2. Questionnaire

To complement the stories, a *questionnaire* from another study was administered to the 25 young people who had completed their coexistence sentence in an educational group in Catalonia before 2020, although adding an open question directly linked to our research objective (Fàbregues, Meneses, Rodríguez-Gómez, & Paré, 2016). The questionnaire met different research objectives. In this study, an open question was included in the following terms: *Write down some of the activities, tasks or practices proposed by the educational group that have helped you to be a more autonomous and responsible person.* The task was worded in a positive way to help improve more deficient aspects. As well as the open question analysed in this study, the general questionnaire also included sociodemographic questions and response questions on a Likert scale related to youth empowerment dimensions and indicators from the HEBE Project.

The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field of youth justice, youth empowerment and evaluation. It also went through a pilot phase, where cognitive interviews were carried out with six young people with similar characteristics to our study cohort (Hilton, 2017; Neuert & Lenzner (2016); Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). This allowed all the questions to be reviewed and refined before obtaining the final questionnaire.

The person answering the questionnaire was told the aims of the research beforehand and asked for their informed consent, as ethically required. They also had to make an explicit declaration of their legal age and acceptance of the conditions of participating in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was administered online, through a secure virtual platform owned by the University of Girona, enabling N = 13 questionnaires to be obtained. This represents 52% of the total cohort. The questionnaires were answered by young people aged between 18 and 21, seven of whom served their judicial sentence in educational group A and six in educational group B. Of the total, 92% were male and 8% female.

3.3. Analysis strategy

Following transcription of the interviews for the N = 5 life stories and the processing of the N = 13 questionnaires, we decided to use category-thematic analysis of the collected data (Harding, 2019). The process was divided into three phases: (1) the theory phase, (2) the identification phase and (3) the interpretation phase (Arbeláez & Onrubia, 2014) (Fig. 1).

(1) The theoretical phase allowed us to establish the following three thematic blocks contrasted with the scientific literature: a) spaces and agents, b) moments and c) processes for youth empowerment.

(2) The identification phase consisted of a first reading of all the material to determine possible patterns that could be used for categories of analysis. This allowed us to make a preliminary classification of all those features and practices of educational groups that, according to young people, are potentially empowering or limiting for their personal and social growth. This classification was based on the thematic blocks established in Phase 1.

(3) In the interpretation phase, a second reading of the material was made in order to be able to relate each of the statements expressed by the young people to the defined patterns. In the event that there were statements which did not fit the initial classification, new patterns were created. In this way, all the contributions of the young people were included in the categories of analysis, even if they only appeared once.

All of this information was systematized using the N-Vivo program, and ordered, classified and anonymized via a coding system.

¹ *Dixit* is a board game that invites you to let your imagination run wild. It contains 84 cards illustrated by Marie Cardouat. Each player must use them to create, tell and guess stories.

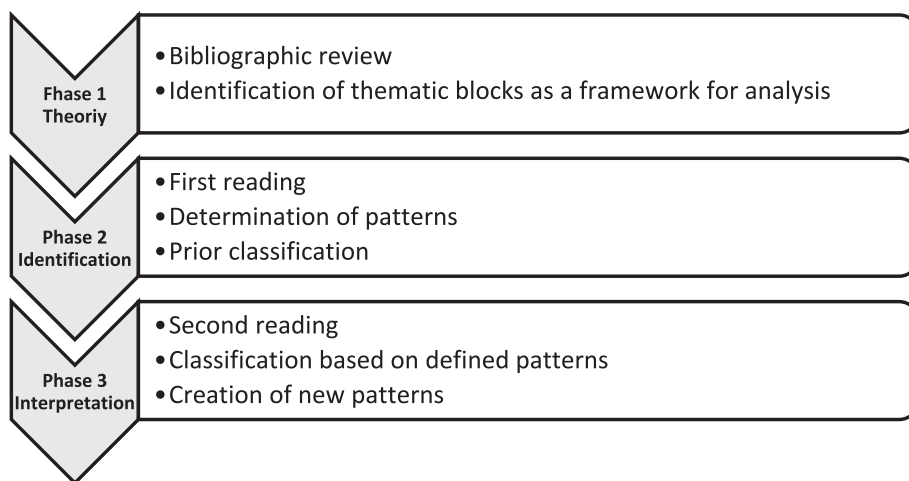


Fig. 1. Process for the category-thematic analysis of life stories and questionnaires.

4. Results

We first present the results obtained from the life stories, then the results obtained from the questionnaires and, finally, the significant correlations that exist between the two methodological strategies that give shape and meaning to the factors which enhance and limit youth empowerment in the sentence to coexist within an educational group in the Catalan youth justice system.

4.1. Results of the life stories

Different activities, tasks or practices implemented by the educational groups have been analysed using the life stories. According to the young people themselves, either because of their approach or execution, they enhanced or limited the development of their ability to make decisions or act according to decisions made (Soler et al., 2017). Table 1 shows the frequency of such activities, tasks or practices.

Among all these factors linked to youth empowerment, 13 different categories were identified and classified according to whether they are a space, an agent, or a moment or process of youth empowerment. Table 2 summarizes this analysis. The first and second columns show the factors that enhanced or limited youth empowerment by each category of analysis. The third column shows the total number of factors by thematic category. The percentages corresponding to each category of analysis are presented in the fourth and fifth columns.

Various contributions can be extracted from the results. Firstly, two factors had the highest frequencies: one positive and the other negative. The enhancing factor mentioned most was the educational team (educators, psychologists...) as an empowering agent; on the other hand, the factors with the highest frequency in all of the life stories (double that of the most mentioned enhancing factor) were control, obligations and prohibitions, and these are considered factors that limit empowerment.

Secondly, four factors are detected that were valued only as enhancing factors; that is, there was no evaluation or interpretation in any of the life stories that attributed any limiting connotation to them in

Table 1
Frequency of factors that enhanced or limited empowerment in the life stories.

	Factors which enhance empowerment	Factors which limit empowerment
Life stories: First in-depth interview	36	37
Life stories: Second in-depth interview	39	27
TOTAL	75	64

terms of empowerment: (1) living together in an educational group; (2) the stage of life when the judicial sentence is served, youth; (3) the experience of going through the youth justice system; and (4) the flexible process of the judicial sentence.

Third, training, work and leisure activities were equally cited as both an enhancing and a limiting factor in terms of empowerment. There was an equally balanced split of young people who valued these activities positively and negatively.

The total number of empowerment factors detected and described by the young people also provides relevant information. According to them, 54% of these empowerment factors are considered to be enhancing, while 46% are limiting factors. The results therefore show a greater, although only slightly greater, perception among young people that the empowerment factors attributed to these centres are enhancing rather than limiting when evaluating the effectiveness of the tools and strategies used. Young people consider educational groups to enhance, rather than limit, their empowerment, as they are an opportunity to develop as autonomous, responsible and purposeful people.

4.2. Results of the questionnaire

A comparison between enhancing and limiting factors cannot be made using the results of the questionnaire because, as discussed in Section 3.2, the questionnaire was designed from a positive perspective. N = 22 enhancing factors, which reinforce the interpretation of the life stories, were cited. The identified factors were grouped into three different categories according to the theoretical framework of study presented previously: spaces and agents, moments or processes of youth empowerment. These categories coincided with the life story analysis. Table 3 reflects the type of factors, together with the number of young people who identified them.

The results reaffirm the data obtained from the life stories, complementing and, in some cases, qualifying them. They mainly reinforce two factors that enhance youth empowerment. The first is the space of living together in an educational group (N = 3); and the second is the educational team as an empowering agent (N = 4). Both factors had been identified mainly as enhancing factors in the life stories.

In addition, training, work and leisure activities (N = 6) and the performance of daily tasks (N = 9) were positively valued as empowering, whereas in the life stories they did not show significant differences when considered as enhancing or limiting factors to empowerment.

Table 2
Thematic categories which explain the factors that enhanced or limited youth empowerment.

	Factors which enhance empowerment	Factors which limit empowerment	TOTAL	% enhanced	% limited
Spaces and agents of youth empowerment					
Living together in an educational group	10	0	10	100%	0%
Location of educational group	1	6	7	14%	86%
Distancing from family setting	3	1	4	75%	15%
Educational team (educators, psychologists, ...)	16	6	22	73%	27%
Peer group (young people who have committed the same crime)	5	2	7	71%	29%
Moments of youth empowerment					
Stage of growing up	1	0	1	100%	0%
Going through the youth justice system	10	0	10	100%	0%
Temporariness of the judicial sentence	0	3	3	0%	100%
Processes for youth empowerment					
Flexibility of the judicial sentence	5	0	5	100%	0%
Supervision after completing the judicial sentence	5	1	6	83%	17%
Control, obligations and prohibitions	4	33	37	11%	89%
Training, work and leisure activities	8	8	16	50%	50%
Daily tasks (cleaning, kitchen, shopping, ...)	7	3	10	70%	30%
TOTAL	75	64	139	54%	46%

Table 3
Thematic categories resulting from analysis of the questionnaires.

Factors which enhance empowerment identified	Number of young people
Spaces and agents of youth empowerment	
Living together in an educational group	3
Educational team (educators, psychologists, ...)	4
Moments of youth empowerment	
-	0
Youth empowerment processes	
Training, work and leisure activities	6
Daily tasks (cleaning, kitchen, shopping, ...)	9
Total	22

4.3. Spaces and agents, moments and processes that enhance youth empowerment

We will now consider the activities, tasks or practices offered by the educational groups that, according to the young people themselves, constitute the most important empowering factors for young people:

4.3.1. Empowering spaces and agents

The educational group is notable for being a space for coexistence, where young people can and should share situations and experiences with other agents. This allows them to practise and adjust multiple skills, such as self-control or teamwork, and achieve meaningful and functional learning applicable to their daily reality. For them, this space is completely empowering – all references to this factor were positive.

Before, I remember that I argued much more with my brother about nonsense. Now I don't argue so much, because things like this happened in the flat and I had to try to control myself. I say he's right more often so that we don't argue. I learned that in the flat, living together. J1.A (2)

Coexistence, in addition, fosters social relationships and bonds, while generating collective feelings such as union, affiliation and a feeling of family. On the whole, the educational group space was valued as a space to meet, empathize and connect with other people, especially when these people were part of the peer group and had committed the same offence of child-to-parent violence. Of the total number of times this factor was mentioned, 71% were positive, since it allows young people to put themselves in someone else's place, reflect, look for joint solutions, help each other or, simply, have someone to rely on without fear of being judged.

Here I've felt truly real – I've been me. I've been able to talk to my flat-mates, to the educators, living with them, we were one big family. I

suppose it's easier to live with young people who've had the same problem as you, isn't it? We've talked a lot - many nights we even went to sleep late because we were talking for hours and hours about our stuff. I tell you, we've been able to create such a great bond that we never stopped talking. J2.A (1)

In addition to the peer group, the members of the educational team (coordinators, educators and psychologists) were mainly referred to as personal agents of youth empowerment. Some 73% of the mentions of this factor were positive, and this was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire. Many of these young people come from unstructured backgrounds and lack healthy role models, so a certain distance from the family environment is required in order to reconstruct and reconvert the violent situations experienced in that environment. They positively value that there are people who trust them and who are willing to help and guide them to shape their present and future in an environment of coexistence free from violence. It allows them to reinforce their self-esteem and consolidate meta-learning.

Simply thanks to living together in a calm, healthy way they were able to make me see that I didn't have to always be uptight. They've given me the confidence to say to myself: you do these things if you like, I won't do them to you. Q3

Being able to talk to the psychologist, the educators... The simple fact of talking. In my house, before, I didn't speak, I never spoke to my mother, and now I can talk to her about anything. Before we avoided each other, we avoided looking at each other. J5.B (1)

4.3.2. Moments related to empowerment

The young people interviewed stated that the judicial sentence had offered them a significant personal experience; in fact, all of them valued it positively. They considered their passage through the youth justice system a learning situation; it had made them reflect, become aware of the consequences of their actions and value their own freedom. According to these young people, the result was that they would think more carefully about what decisions or actions to take in order to avoid going back through the justice system. Therefore, they would act with greater responsibility and efficiency from now on. Some doubt must be attached to this statement, however, as it later became evident that there were aspects the young people felt could be improved or questioned.

Thanks to all this, I now value my freedom much more. For example, my friends tell me to go and paint trains ... I have mates who paint trains, graffiti trains. Doing this, if you get caught, you go to the cells. It's illegal, it's a massive fine. Of course, I would've done it before, before entering the

educational group I would've done it. Now that they've taken away my freedom, now that I know what it is to be in a cell, pfff ... no way, no way, there's no way I'd risk it, no way, no way, no way. I'm not doing that, I promise you I'm not. J4.B (2)

For this experience to be useful and meaningful, the young people interviewed considered that it was important to have had the experience when they were older youths, as this was the ideal time to take advantage of learning from the experience of this judicial sentence. If they were to have had this experience as younger children or during adolescence, they believe that the opportunities to experiment, try things out and make mistakes would have been reduced, and that they would have learnt less and the experience would have had less effect. In some ways the situation would have been wasted.

I am glad I entered when I was 17, not 14 or 15, because, basically, it would've ruined my adolescence. At 17, it seems ok, it's fine, because by the time I was 17 I'd already done everything I wanted to do: I've done my nonsense with drugs, I've had a thousand and one girlfriends, friends... I've done many crazy things, whatever I wanted, basically. I was caught when I was 17, almost 18. Well, look, you're of legal age and you have to focus. J5.B (2)

4.3.3. Processes considered empowering

The structure of, and political will evident in, this judicial sentence benefits young people, especially its flexibility and the fact that it adapts to their real needs and interests. Being able to enter and leave the educational and rehabilitation centre, being able to obtain permission to stay at home from time to time or letting members of the family join the same educational group, all while serving the judicial sentence, are some of the options that the judicial sentence offers and which, according to the young users of the service themselves, help reinforce the empowerment of young people. It forces them to assume and meet commitments, apply the learning carried out in their daily lives and be fully involved in their own reintegration and rehabilitation process. Comments about the flexibility of the sentence were all positive with regards to empowerment.

About two months or so ago, they let me go home more often and for me it's been better. I went home every week and I was able to be there longer. I've been able to do things with my mother ... [...] And with my father ... because he was able to come to the educational group and we were talking about everything. I apologized for my behaviour and ... we talked about everything, about what we'd do from now on, about the days I would go with him ... about everything. J6.B (1)

Once the judicial sentence is completed, the educational group tries to monitor its young people regularly, mainly through intimate tools or strategies available to all of them (private messages, phone calls...). The young people require the attention and support of the educational team to gradually adapt to their new reality. This monitoring tends to give them greater communication skills, confidence, security and support to the young people. For this reason, 83% of the comments about this factor considered it satisfactory and that it enhances youth empowerment.

Sometimes I need to see the educators, to talk to them, because, like it or not, I've been with them for a long time. They know what I'm like and they know how to give me the advice I need. Sometimes they also ask me questions and get me to open up, they're interested in how my life is going. J2.A (2)

The young people also mentioned the various activities and tasks they did in the educational group. Some 50% of the evaluations of these activities and tasks were negative and the other 50% positive. However, the questionnaires allowed us to define this factor as more enhancing than limiting. They highlighted training activities (taking courses, etc.),

work activities (preparing your own CV and looking for a job, etc.) and recreational activities (taking trips to the beach or the mountains, etc.) as changing and transforming the way they are and how they relate to the world, helping them set personal challenges and discover new interests.

Doing things in front of people like... I used to be very shy, you know? I remember when the psychologist from the educational group told me that I had to go to I don't know how many employment agencies to take CVs, by myself, it was like: What? I have to go alone where? I was very insecure... I remember being very afraid and nervous, but little by little, having to face situations like these has helped me to be less shy, to be more active, I don't know, to be less embarrassed. Going to a class without knowing anybody or going to a job, the first day when I didn't know anybody, having to introduce myself... These things have helped me a lot. J4.B (2)

With regards to tasks, most of the young people considered that having to cook, clean or do the shopping, for example, is necessary for empowerment. Daily tasks force them to establish a routine, to collaborate in the context of coexistence and to act with autonomy and independence. They considered this to be an enhancing factor, with 70% positive comments about this. This positive orientation of the factor was confirmed by the data from the questionnaires.

Well, every week we did the shopping and every day we had to clean the flat. This helped me get into a routine. (Q6)

Let's see, now I'm more independent, more autonomous, because there they forced you to wake up, make your bed, cook, clean, do the shopping... And now, when you're at home, you know how to do these things, and if you don't do them, it's because you don't want to, but you know how to do them. This will serve you for a lifetime. J2.A (2)

4.4. Spaces and agents, moments and processes that limit youth empowerment

The young people also highlighted activities, tasks or practices that hinder or obstruct the correct development and consolidation of youth empowerment. Among those most mentioned, the following stand out:

4.4.1. Spaces and agents that limit empowerment

Coexistence in an educational group is a judicial sentence that has only recently been adopted in Catalonia. There are currently only two specialized units in the whole region, which forces youth from various areas to be referred to one of these two centres. There may therefore be young people serving the judicial sentence far from where they usually live. Inevitably, most of the young people believe this limits their empowerment (86% of the comments on this topic said this). Being far from home presents them with many difficulties, while requiring them to co-construct a new family reality with all the agents involved in the conflict of child-to-parent violence. There are situations in which family members cannot regularly go to the educational group because of the distance. This reduces the chances of good teamwork between the young person and their family.

I really believe that the educational group hasn't helped so much in improving the relationship with my mother [...] because my mother hasn't been able to come here much. The educational group is a long way from where we live and she hasn't been able to get so involved in all this. She doesn't have a car and of course, maybe she has come here 5 times in 10 months. J4.B (1)

This distance also limits the creation and consolidation of links or connections with the local environment. While the young people are living together in an educational group, they establish relationships in the area where the unit is. Once they have served their judicial sentence, they normally return to their usual place of residence, which forces them to break the community ties established during the period of their

judicial sentence and to start again in their family context. Often this generates frustration, personal instability and problems with work, educational, social and family ties.

It's a problem, you know? I have to leave here and start all over again there because now I'm a long way from home. What am I doing working here if later I'll go back home? I don't have a driving licence or anything..." J5.B (1)

4.4.2. Moments related to disempowerment

The period of coexistence in an educational group is usually between six and nine months, which can be extended or reduced depending on the personal situation in each case. During this period, the young people go through different phases: (1) acceptance of the change of habitual residence, (2) adaptation and learning in the new context, and (3) preparation for the transition to life outside the educational group. Completing one phase and moving on to the next takes more or less time depending on the individual. That said, comments about the length of time were all negative, showing that it is not ideal for ensuring the process of youth empowerment. When the young people thought that the time spent in the educational group was excessive, they expressed feelings of anger and frustration, as well as not much inclination to learn while they were there. When they thought the length of time was too short, they showed some emotional instability, dependency and insecurity, feeling they were not prepared to take charge of their own lives autonomously and independently.

Most of the time it was a waste of time, especially a whole year. If it had been six months, well maybe, but I think a year is too much. It's a long time, isn't it? A long time to be taught how to do things that you already know how to do. A waste of time. J6.B (2)

Although I've got better, it's like I say, I don't have a good vibe, I don't know. I don't have a good feeling, I don't think I'm ready for ... pff ... I don't know. As things are at the moment, I think there could be a conflict at any time. The truth is, I'd rather finish school here, in the flat. [...] Here I'd be calmer, I could later find a job, pay for a flat, for example, so I wouldn't have to go home. I don't know, it seems like I haven't been here very long. I need more time to finish my studies and start a new life away from home. J2.A (1)

4.4.3. Processes considered disempowering

Youth empowerment is also principally limited by the methods applied and activities carried out within the educational group.

Most of the young people said that the control, obligation and prohibition techniques applied by the institution do not favour the full development of abilities and skills such as responsibility, autonomy or self-esteem. Some 89% of the comments about this were negative or called it limiting.

Although it is an open regime sentence, many of the young people felt it was like a closed prison sentence and defined it as such. They perceived it as a space with continuous restrictions, which did not allow them to do what they wanted to do when they wanted to, and which regulated them and imposed too rigid daily habits, so it was very difficult for them to be consistently autonomous and to assume responsibilities voluntarily and realistically.

An open space, which they define as an educational group that has nothing to do with a secure centre for young people, what do you want me say? Many of the things they do are the same as in secure centres, typical of secure centres. So, if you're trying to make this different, much more liberal, don't have so many restrictions, because, I promise, young people work better when we have fewer restrictions imposed on us [...] I've had a lot of arguments with educators who came from secure centres who thought the flat was a secure centre and they were super strict, they controlled you a lot. J2.A (2)

When I left the educational group, I started smoking again because ... well, I don't like being told what not to do. I couldn't wait... Because in the flat I wasn't allowed to smoke, as soon as I left, ha! In the last few months I've smoked masses because they didn't let me smoke there. J5.B (2)

According to most of the young people, control and excessive imposition of obligations and prohibitions stopped them from doing what they wanted to do and caused feelings of rejection, anger and frustration, which were often difficult for them to channel. They tended to perceive this as a punishment, and therefore not a relevant, functional or meaningful experience.

You know what? It was like being punished, and I fought back and I'm just not sure what I learned there. [...] Too many rules that pissed me off and that were useless. J6.B (2)

Regarding activities, although the results of the questionnaire ended up categorizing this more as an enhancing than a limiting factor, 50% of the evaluations obtained in the life stories were negative in this respect. Some young people considered that the activities carried out in the context of the judicial sentence did not fully respond to their interests or needs. According to them, they were not practical, experimental and dynamic activities that endowed them with useful learning for life. They considered them to be very individualized activities, and that perhaps working more collectively would serve them better to promote their participation and teamwork.

I think it's very individualized. [...] It's like group work was not promoted much. I think it would be good if they brought us together more, if we did more group sessions, all together, group talks, talking. It was very individualized, as everyone did their own thing, we didn't get very involved with one another. J4.B (2)

5. Discussion

Despite being unusual, the approach adopted in this research allows the results to be related to programmes and models that define strategies and techniques used in the youth justice system for the intervention, treatment and rehabilitation of young people who commit crimes of child-to-parent violence.

Most intervention programmes in these centres focus on learning communication skills, controlling emotions, resolving conflicts and empowering young people in a way that allows them to make decisions and live responsibly (Ibabe et al., 2018). They demonstrate the effectiveness of young people and their parents alternately working together and separately (Anderson & Routt, 2004). With regard to working together, there is clear evidence that parents play a fundamental role in the growth, development and empowerment of their children, so the presence of parents and their training during the process permits work from a starting point of conflict, which leads to a change in the dynamics of living together (Aizpurua, Applegate, Bolin, Vuk, & Ouellette, 2020; Coogan & Lauster, 2015). As well as the minors themselves, young people's families are also considered partly responsible for the youth criminal activity and, as such, should be involved in the rehabilitation process (Aizpurua et al., 2020; Schwalbe, 2019). Even so, family relationships are often so damaged that the young person's temporary distancing from the family context is necessary. Hence the combination of joint and separate work is beneficial and necessary. This does not mean that there should only be individual work. Programmes like the one proposed by González et al. (2013) have demonstrated the effectiveness of addressing this type of offence jointly. Establishing healthy coexistence frameworks or doing training, work and leisure activities with other people helps young people put their needs and interests and the circumstance of their day-to-day life in context and practise skills such as controlling their emotions, trust or social cohesion. As shown by the Brak4Change Partnership (2015) programme, the socio-educational

team should always accompany, support and guide young people during and after child-to-parent violence interventions. This is the best way to confirm that progress is being made and to promote the empowerment of the young people involved.

The intervention model that best coincides with the results obtained is The Good Lives Model (Fortune, Ward, & Polaschek, 2014; Maloić, 2016; Mathys, 2017; Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007). It is a model based on people's strengths, which aims to manage risk by improving young people's skills at getting what they need and value in a socially responsible, acceptable and legal way (Mathys, 2017). As the research shows, and as described by Maloić (2016) in The Good Lives Model, effective intervention offers spaces that are as open and flexible as possible, with motivational, supportive professional agents who are committed to constructive cooperation with conflictive individuals. It also includes measures designed to strengthen personal and social capital. The young people involved should be able to practise skills directly in the community, either through daily tasks which make living together easier or through specific activities that are related to their interests or positive aspirations (work, education, leisure...).

The sentence of coexistence in an educational group invites a discussion on control, obligation and prohibition techniques. The power that is usually exercised by the justice system itself is often questioned since, to a certain extent, it restricts the real empowerment of people. Offenders are grouped together in specific spaces and in this way separated and isolated from society and from their environment (Goffman, 2001). Through the relationship of space and time, people adopt a daily routine which is formally administered and managed by the people in charge of the institutions. It forces individuals to behave and act according to certain rules, with the aim of taming, manipulating, transforming and perfecting bodies to make them more docile and obedient (Foucault, 2002). The desired behaviour is thus achieved because people end up adopting avoidance, acceptance or resignation strategies in order to survive within the system (Novo, Pereira, Vázquez, & Amado, 2017). In this sense, the results of the study coincide with that posited by Schwalbe (2019). Minimizing the use of negative pressure and emphasizing positive pressure has the most effective outcomes. To show real and significant change, people have to be able to feel responsible, not be forced to be responsible. Responsibility must come from within, must develop intrinsically; this will happen when it is connected with personal interests, experiences and needs. In this way, the person will be able to express thoughts or the desire to compensate for damage caused, to rebuild bonds and to change their attitudes and behaviour (González et al., 2013). In short, the idea is to promote personal growth thinking about the future, based on the creation of meaning from personal experiences - experiences which invite the person to reflect on what they can or should be and to move forward in life (Greenbaum & Javdani, 2017).

6. Conclusions

It makes sense to speak of the educational group as an empowering youth justice judicial sentence. The young people themselves who have served these sentences have been able to identify spaces and agents, moments and processes that have mostly favoured the development of soft skills such as self-esteem, responsibility or autonomy. Living together in an educational group has allowed them, in their own words, to acquire or consolidate good habits and behaviour through their daily activities and interactions. It is, therefore, a significant life experience, which generates self-awareness and maturity, reinforces individuals' well-being and security, and helps them to be able to act and make life decisions responsibly.

However, there are also factors which, according to the young people in these services, limit their empowerment. These limiting factors suggest a series of reflections on how to improve future socio-educational interventions.

Taking young people out of their habitual and daily context to

comply with the judicial sentence makes direct and practical work on the reality of where the conflict comes from difficult. If we want to consolidate learning, we must ensure interventions that are closely linked to young people's day-to-day environment.

Among the clear limitations of this measure, the use of restrictive or coercive practices also stands out. Imposing these generates rejection and minimizes willingness to change, improve or transform, which hinders the correct development of youth empowerment. However, laws, regulations or obligations are necessary for social coexistence, so it is necessary to help young people see these demands as something practical and functional for life. Obligations should come from within; they should be taken on board freely and voluntarily. We change, learn or transform when the process is personally significant, when it is based on our own internal values (Ferguson et al., 2017). For all these reasons, it is necessary to help identify the interests, needs and personal motivations that encourage each young person to change. As noted in the Discussion section, this is a very good strategy for minimizing prescribed behaviours, since it is possible to induce responsibility in young people via voluntariness, awareness, understanding and individual and collective commitment.

In conclusion, the service studied here is positively valued since there are clear indications of it promoting empowerment processes and outcomes among the young people it serves. At the same time, clues are provided as to how to review the limitations that have been detected and detailed in Section 4.4. Giving real meaning to the intervention is recommended, which entails addressing the causes and effects of the offence in order to re-establish the social bond that has been broken by the person who breaks the law (Aguayo & Cedeño, 2018). The results show that when learning is useful in young people's daily lives, it allows them to put empowering abilities into action. For example, as seen in Section 4.3.1, living with other agents makes young people practice useful skills for daily coexistence with their families (self-control, cooperation, etc.). Therefore, it is necessary to work on, and from, the reality that has caused the problem, restoring what has been broken through empowerment, recognition, accountability and the repair of fractured relationships (Calvo, 2018). According to the young people interviewed in this study, they are aware of the problem when they interact and live in a community. It is an opportunity to get involved in the rehabilitation process itself, identifying and reconstructing behaviours and attitudes based on their own personal experience. The youth justice system, rather than being seen as a punishment, can be thought of as a way of repairing the damage caused, through empathy, responsibility and personal awareness (Corrales, 2018). The restorative approach will improve justice, since it will be more tailored to the needs and interests of individuals and the community.

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Ethical approval

All of this research was approved by the University of Girona's Research Ethics and Biosafety Committee. Compliance with ethical principles was ensured throughout the design, application and treatment of the research data.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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