

# Diversity concept and Code of Conduct of „Care Leaver Statistics (CLS) Participation in the life course of young adults -a long-term study“

Last update: Autumn 2022

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## **Introduction**

From the beginning, the CLS study team was engaged in a debate about how to deal with diversity, social exclusion, barriers of research participation and research ethics. In the course of the discussion, a working group was initiated and authored this text to record the status. Initially, the aim of the text was an understanding of stances within the project. In order to make the reflection on research ethics transparent, it is now published on our website. Since this is the current status (autumn 2022), the text and the concept are not yet finalised, but are intended to offer interested parties key topics for discussions. The diversity concept and Code of Conduct also formulate requirements for research practice at CLS: This should make it easier for people with questions or complaints to contact the research team.

This text consists of two parts: the diversity concept and the Code of Conduct. The initial focus is the diversity concept in which we drafted how we view the responsibility of research in relation to social diversity, difference and inequality. The diversity concept of the CLS study contains four aspects or basic elements:

1. The recognition and openness to diversity and differences
2. Awareness on discrimination and aiming for inclusion
3. Reflection on relations of power, oppression and inequality
4. Transparency regarding boundaries and decisions

The specific application of the diversity concept is also described and documented in a Code of Conduct which includes the following (work) areas:

1. Text production and the reflective use of language
2. Instrument development
3. Participation
4. Awareness of violence experiences
5. Training of interviewers
6. Secondary analysis

The reflective application and further development of the research-ethical elements diversity concept and code of conduct will take place continuously during the research process and as required for specific contents.

### **Diversity concept – positioning of the CLS Study**

The CLS study does not regard care leavers as a homogeneous, but as a heterogeneous group who share the fact that during part of their childhood and/or adolescence they had experience(s) in residential or foster care. They are young people who shape their childhood and adolescence and – like all people – in all their differences, have a right to equal rights, recognition and encouragement of their subjectivity and participation in all areas of life (cf. Zukunftsforum Heimerziehung 2021). In the view of the CLS study, diversity means recognizing experiences, life situations and life plans in their differences and not reproducing discrimination, stigmatization and attributions by the CLS study as much as possible.

According to research-ethical reflexivity (cf. von Unger 2018), the diversity concept states that the CLS team continuously critically examines its attitudes in research practice and their effects on their research work. Choosing the reflexive approach by taking diversity into consideration allows that specific topics and practical research questions of the study can be discussed ..

### 1. The recognition and openness to diversity and differences

The recognition and openness to diversity and differences means acknowledging the subjective life plans, ways of life, affiliations and self-descriptions of the young people interviewed. Within the framework of the study and its implementation, equality and appreciation are pursued, regardless of the social status, life situation and the individual future aspirations of the care leavers.

With the diversity concept, we also refer to the intersectional interdependence of categories of difference in the production of marginalizing social structures and social status. Intersectional approaches to diversity are characterized by describing people as being different without associating them within a hierarchical arrangement. The CLS study is also about making different experiences and different resources of marginalized groups visible.

We assume that the young people have specific shared experiences, life plans and challenges to be faced, but also differences among them that are relevant to the CLS study. Differences in status that become visible in the dimensions of participation are to be located in the social context and analysed with reference to socio-structural conditions.

2. Awareness of discrimination and aiming for inclusion From the perspective of diversity, participation is inter alia an effect of attributions and processes of inclusion and exclusion (cf. Bartelheimer 2020). Awareness of discrimination does not mean drawing conclusions about individuals and their further course of life from individual characteristics. The influence of poverty, wealth, access to education, gender, mobility, escape, psycho-traumatization and/or leaving care on participation differs by social constellations, environmental conditions, subjective positioning and by the course of life in general. When developing the tools, the goal is to avoid stigmatizing categories. An attempt is made to collect data on the different life courses of young people using exploratory questions. Part of the inclusive approach of the CLS Study is that young adults in precarious situations (shortage of housing, deportation, debt, imprisonment, etc.) can also participate and include their experiences in the study.

### 3. Reflection on relations of power, oppression and inequality

The CLS study aims to be statistically representative of care leavers and, with regard to some dimensions of participation to compare the data with other panel studies (including SOEP, AID:A, PAIRFAM; cf. Erzberger et al. 2019). The generated data should produce solid statements and analysis about the consequences of transitions that are also apparent in connection with social support, help and organisation systems over the course of life and seeks to show what further development needs can be derived from this for young individuals. In this context, diversity awareness means that the groups are not classified into individual categories, but rather that these are reflected and contextualized - intersectionally - in the interdependence of societal, social, structural, cultural, organisational and political barriers to participation as well as power and inequality relations.

#### 4. Transparency of boundaries and decisions

In the research-ethical reflection, possibilities and limitations of diversity are considered and discussed. The proceeding is reasoned and documented to ensure transparency in the project. The research network also requests the expertise of third parties (e.g., care leavers, scientists, legal experts, practitioners) for specific topics and is thus open to critical discussion. In addition, methodological considerations have to be taken, which could limit the awareness of diversity in the survey instrument and during the research process.

For example the quantitative study design requires a standardized survey instrument that adapts over the course of the survey waves to the circumstances and life course of the young people (e.g. through specific instrument development, filter questions, the use of participatory elements in instrument development), but it can be assumed that the survey instrument is not consistently diversity-sensitive and excludes some people with disabilities (cf. UN-CRPD 2018). For a diversity-sensitive, barrier-free and inclusive research design, a more differentiated and expensive approach would be necessary, which is not affordable regarding the current financial project framework.

### **Code of Conduct of the CLS Study**

#### 1. Text production and the reflective use of language

We follow the standards for non-discriminatory and inclusive language in our project text production. Texts on the website, in materials and publications are written in a gender-sensitive language. In the questionnaire and in texts on the website, clear and easily understandable language takes precedence over scientific jargon, as far as this is possible. Due to pragmatic research and cost-related reasons, the survey is conducted exclusively in German.

## 2. Instrument development

In order to query the diversity of the participants, indicators are integrated in the development of the survey instrument. It is continuously checked whether discriminatory categories can be modified or omitted. The main focus is on researching the social participation of care leavers in the course of life. The questionnaire is designed to make the study scientifically compatible and comparable. The survey instrument, therefore, sometimes applies excluding scales, which do not fully correspond to the diversity concept. The aim is to reflect and contextualize the collected data in the evaluation process. This means finding compromise solutions between the different requirements of the instrument that are considered in detail. A concrete example of a solution is that parallel to the query of the designated gender at birth, the self-assigned gender is assessed. Recognition-oriented questions also form the basic structure of the questionnaire in order to avoid individualizing the barriers to participation and not shifting structural deficits into the responsibility of the subjects. The methodological approach (quantitative panel study) requires decisions that do not comprehensively cover all forms of diversity. This must be taken into account when evaluating and deriving results, for example on the needs of the study participants. Despite all efforts, the sample will not reflect the full diversity of young people in residential care. The CLS team aims to reach as many young people as possible with comprehensive and easily accessible information.

## 3. Participation

The diversity concept will be applicable in the application of participatory elements. These are workshops on developing instruments and focus groups with care leavers and young people in child and youth care, as well as inviting care leavers to the advisory board of the CLS Study.

Through the feedback and comments from care leavers, exclusionary and normative categorizations can become visible which will help to adapt the main topics and formulations in the questionnaire and in the course of the panel maintenance of the CLS Study. The study should contribute to the social participation of care leavers and to more visibility of their perspectives. As part of maintaining the panel, the young people being surveyed are also included in the conception and design of an accompanying programme.

#### 4. Awareness regarding experiences of violence

In order to survey the participation of care leavers, wide-ranging dimensions must be researched and considered, which are located in the personal life experiences of young people. Considering this, it is possible that most experiences of violence are addressed indirectly or directly. Disclosures, i.e., realizations and disclosure of violence, can also occur. It is part of the research-ethical responsibility to react to the recollection of traumatic experiences and to approach the young people with a respectful attitude and to respect their limits when these are expressed during the interviews. If the interviewers feel that the survey was upsetting for the young person concerned, they can give the participants contact details of counseling centres so that they can contact relevant points of contact for further support.

#### 5. Training of interviewers

The survey institute infas has been commissioned with the CLS Study and is therefore responsible for the interviewers, who are trained in diversity sensitivity, among other things. During the first wave of the survey, all study participants will be interviewed in person (CAPI). In the following surveys, other survey methods, e.g., via telephone and web-based interviews



(CATI, CAWI) are also possible. Considering the diversity concept, the following topics for the awareness raising of the interviewers were identified by the CLS study:

- Respect for young people (interviewers are informed about an affirming attitude towards diversity in the project)
- Mindfulness towards the interviewees and the possibility to pause the interview and skip items
- Interviewers address adolescents and young adults with the desired pronouns and names.
- Dealing with stressful interview situations (option to initiate breaks or to be able to stop the interview)
- Back-up for disclosure and need for advice: Provide references and contacts to support young people and, if necessary, explore the possibility of advice after consultation with the young people. Taking into account that interviewers are not able to offer advice and support and therefore focus on whether the young person has trusted persons to turn to.

## 6. Secondary analysis

Over the course of the CLS Study, the anonymized data material will be made available for secondary use with the help of scientific use files (SUF). This makes the generated research data publicly available and can be analysed for various purposes. This means that questions and research projects are also being developed outside of the CLS network and diversity sensitivity can no longer be actively controlled and reflected upon. The research network informs users of the existence of this diversity concept.

## **Perspective**

The study generates a differentiated and contextualized knowledge base that may contribute to the discussion and improve the social participation of care leavers. The young people can experience the interest in and the examination of the objective, subjective and aspirated life situation as an interesting reflection process. A central concern of the CLS Study is to enable young people to discover the objectives of the study and (interim) results and to exercise their rights as the analysed person. The well-being of the study participants must be taken into account in every decision. The diversity concept provides a basis for this which is supplemented by reflections on research ethics and data protection measures. The diversity concept and the Code of Conduct will be modified and extended in the course of ongoing reflection on new developments and findings.

## **Literature**

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