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Presentation title: Secure units as emotional sites: staff perceptions of fear and violence at secure units for young people in Sweden

Secure units for adolescents are emotion-filled places for various reasons, yet previous studies have shown that fear seems to be an emotion which is difficult to deal with in these workplaces. This paper examines how secure unit staff describe their workday, focusing on fear. The analysis applies theories about emotional work as well as the concept of fear. The article builds on 53 semi-structured interviews with staff at three secure units for detained boys and girls run by the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care. The findings illustrate different ways in which staff handle emotions, such as fear, at these institutions. Results are discussed with respect to five themes: (a) the importance of control; (b) safety: not a regular workplace; (c) not my anxiety, but the young person's; (d) security: standing safe with co-workers; and (e) the ambiguous fear. The results show the importance of taking emotions seriously in daily work, as this renders visible how staff emotionally socialize into their organization. Due to a lack of education and professional identity among staff, the socialization process is highly relevant, as it is primarily perceptions of youth and co-workers that control and develop professionalization for staff. Bullet points: (1) Work in secure units needs to be conceptualized as emotional work due to the emotional geography of the institution. (2) How staff perceive young people—dangerous and violent versus vulnerable have consequences for how work is conducted. (3) Staff do not always dare to show certain emotions, which risks leading to a contextualization of secure units as controlling instead of emotional institutions. (4) Fear is a prominent emotion, but staff who show fear take a big risk in relation to young people and co-workers. (5) Staff must be given the opportunity to develop an emotional language for their professional everyday life, for example through supervision.