



The Role of Ethnicity in Child and Youth Care Practice: "When They Heard My Last Name, They Suddenly Respected Me"

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Abstract

Background The issue of ethnicity is central to the field of Child and Youth Care (CYC), yet the ways in which the ethnic identity of CYC workers is manifested and related to their practice has remained significantly understudied.

Objective The present research examines the role of ethnic identity in the personal and professional lives of Mizrahi (Asian or North African background) and Ashkenazi (European background) CYC workers in Israel, and the way it is manifested in their practice with marginalized youth.

Methods This qualitative phenomenological study examined in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 33 Israeli CYC workers (18 Mizrahi and 15 Ashkenazi).

Results The data suggests that the workers' ethnic background and identity are related to their perception of ethnicity and its role in their personal and professional lives. Mizrahi workers reported high ingroup identification and a strong ethnic identity, while Ashkenazi workers tended to perceive ethnic issues as irrelevant. These differences shape the way CYC workers' ethnic identities are played out in their practice and impact their relations with the youth.

Conclusions The findings emphasize the issue of ethnic identity in CYC practice, suggesting issues of ethnicity, location of self, and color blindness should be incorporated in the professional development of CYC workers and as part of the essence of CYC practice in multi-ethnic societies.

Keywords CYC · Ethnic identity · Ethnicity · Marginalized youth

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