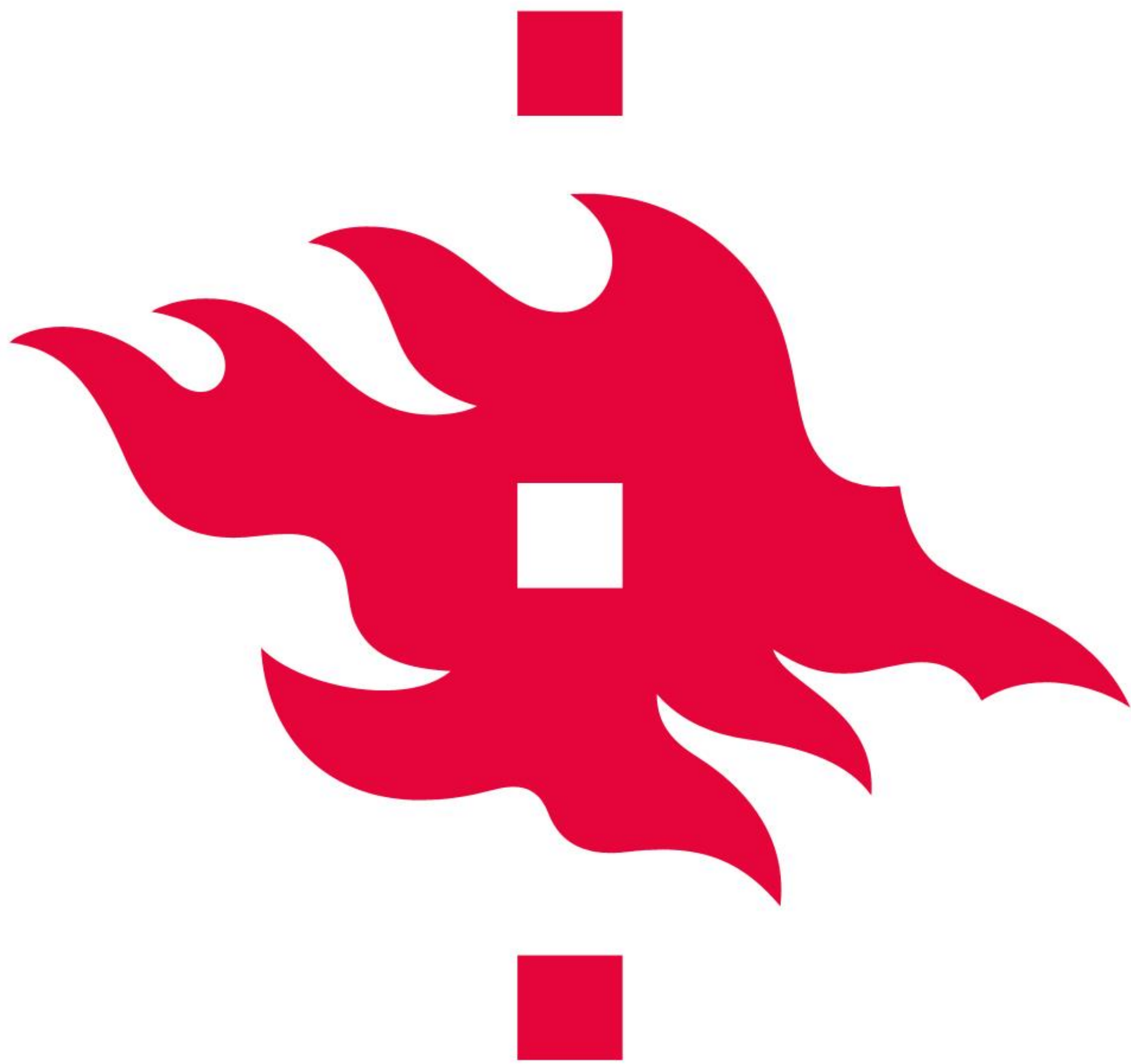




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Monitoring What Matters: Validating measures for adolescents in residential care for research and everyday practice

BACKGROUND

- Residential care is expected to provide adolescents with safety, care and opportunities for psychosocial change.
- However, outcome monitoring in out-of-home care remains fragmented, and comparable, validated measures are lacking.
- Despite major human and financial significance, the evidence base for short-term effectiveness in residential care is still thin, and service content is often insufficiently described.

To evaluate effectiveness meaningfully, we first need to define what should be monitored.

AIM

In two ongoing research projects (2024–2030) funded by the Strategic Research Council in Finland and the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health,

- we aim to develop a research-based foundation for outcome monitoring in residential care by identifying meaningful change mechanisms and testing measures that can be used both in research and everyday practice.

WHAT SHOULD BE MONITORED?

- A programme theory was developed with **national experts, residential care staff and adolescents living in residential care units.**
- Data included seven expert interviews, three staff group interviews and three workshops with adolescents aged 12–17.
- The programme theory identifies two broad child-level outcome domains:
 - **emotional warmth, safety and being cared for**
 - **psychosocial wellbeing and change**

Outcome monitoring in residential care should be grounded in what adolescents, professionals and experts identify as meaningful: safety, emotional warmth, trust, relationships, motivation and psychosocial change.

FROM KEY MECHANISMS TO MEASURABLE DIMENSIONS

The selected measures reflect the mechanisms and outcomes identified as meaningful by adolescents, professionals and experts: safety, emotional warmth, trust, motivation, social climate and psychosocial wellbeing.

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

- Phase 1: Defining what matters.** Programme theory development through literature, expert interviews, staff interviews and adolescent workshops.
- Phase 2: Adapting measures.** Translation, cultural adaptation and piloting of selected instruments (Facit-method).
- Phase 3: Validate measures.** Psychometric evaluation of reliability, validity and sensitivity to change.
- Phase 4: Implement and recommend.** Evaluation of feasibility and usefulness in routine practice; development of national recommendations.

CONTRIBUTION

- Provides a theory-informed basis for outcome monitoring in residential care.
- Supports social workers and residential care staff in following children’s individual situations.
- Enables comparable data across services and settings.
- Contributes to national recommendations on measures for out-of-home care in Finland.

PROGRAMME THEORY DIMENSION	MEASURE	PERSPECTIVE
Emotional warmth and safety	CEWSS-A	Adolescent
Motivation and trust	ATMQ	Adolescent
Social climate of the unit	EssenCES	Adolescent and staff
Psychosocial wellbeing and difficulties	SDQ	Adolescent and carer/staff
Individual goals and goal attainment	Method being developed	Child, parent(s), social worker, key worker – in dialogue

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