Meanings of Living in Lodgings during Senior High School.

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Abstract

Studies show that senior high school students living in lodgings (away from home) when attending high school are vulnerable to stress and mental health problems. Moving away from home at the age of 15-16 is a transition that might affect adolescents' well-being. The aim of this study is to explore the experience of living in lodgings during senior high school. In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 Norwegian lodgers of both genders between the ages of 16 to 18. Interviews were analyzed according to a phenomenological hermeneutical approach. Four main themes were identified: a) Striving between controlling time and being controlled by time, b) Striving between finding comfort in being alone and feeling left alone, c) Striving between being independent and being taken care of, d) Striving between leaving and finding home. *Conclusion:* The findings illuminate many challenges experienced by lodgers. A raised awareness and preventive initiatives from school nurses are recommended.

Key words: Adolescents, lodgings, senior high school, transition, wellbeing

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Introduction

Adolescence can be described as a transition from childhood to adulthood, a transitional developmental period characterized by major changes in life, ending with entering the role as an independent and responsible adult (Williams et al., 2002). While the transition through adolescence is inevitable, the speed and magnitude of these changes overtax the capacity of many young people to cope, (Byrne, Davenport, & Mazanov, 2007) and the phenomenon of adolescent stress is now recognized (Collishaw, 2015; Sletten & Bakken, 2016). In Norway there has been an increase in mental health problems in adolescents, and especially among girls during the last 20 years (Von Soest & Wichstrøm, 2014). International studies show the same picture; adolescents between 15 and 18 years are increasingly vulnerable regarding mental health problems (Bor, Dean, Najman, & Hayatbakhsh, 2014; Collishaw, 2015). There are different and complex explanations for this development as society and the adolescents environment changes (Sletten & Bakken, 2016).

In Western countries, adolescents from the age of 15 – 16 leave junior high school to attend senior high school. Transitions to new schools are considered a stressful event that adolescents endure in their progression to adulthood (Barber & Olsen, 2004), and school transitions from one school to another may be related to mental health among adolescents (Symonds, Dietrich, Chow, & Salmela-Aro, 2016). Transitional life events, such as entering a new school, involve substantial changes in the individuals' environment or circumstances. Normally, a transition to senior high school represents an increase in student body size and heterogeneity. Students tend to lose contact with previous close friends, and the new setting challenges them to establish a supportive peer group among a student body that is larger and more diverse than their former school (Darmody, 2008). In addition, the structure of students' school days changes as they may have different classes and teachers for each subject, and the

students must gain the acceptance of new teachers, learn and adapt to a variety of instructional styles, different set of rules and expectations. In the more impersonal senior high schools, students experience less contact with their teachers (Darmody, 2008; Pereira & Pooley, 2007) and reduced support structures (Smyth, McCoy, & Darmody, 2004).

In parts of the world adolescents have to leave their home in order to attend school. For example, in Norway and other Scandinavian countries, between 15 % and 20 % have to leave their family home at the age of 15 – 16 to live in lodgings during senior high school due to geographical distances in rural areas and/or choice of education program (Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Finland, personal communication, September 16, 2016). Lodgings in this regards means renting a private room on their own nearby the school, normally with access to kitchen facilities. The lodgers are not living together with a host family, but are financially supported from the national authorities to pay for their expenses, hiring a place to live. Leaving home at an early age entails potentially stressful changes, and moving away from home during this time is a transition in life that seems to affect adolescents' well-being, with the possible consequences of dropping out of school and/or potential mental health problem (Markussen, 2011). Studies have shown that high school students living in lodgings are vulnerable to stress and mental health problems (Wannebo & Wichstrøm, 2010; White et al., 2006). Throughout the years only few studies have been published on adolescents moving from home to attend school at such an early age, although several studies have been conducted on older adolescents, ages 19 – 20 years when moving from home to go to college or university. These studies show that students in lodgings struggle with homesickness, loneliness, depression, anxiety and/or stress (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Blanco et al., 2008; Cleary, Walter, & Jackson, 2011; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). Among the practical issues and potential stressors, are the loss of one's friends, the need to form fresh relationships, becoming acquainted with new roommates, dealing with

different methods of learning, and the expectation of increased autonomy in life and studies (Cleary et al., 2011). Further, older adolescents living away from home during college, have less parental oversight; they may lose connections to family, peer groups, favorite activities, and social support networks (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). Generally, they have complete responsibility for self-management of their own mental and physical health as well as financial and housekeeping concerns (Cleary et al., 2011). The transition to college and leaving home represents a marked break from previous routines and lifestyle, as well as adaption to a completely new environment involving academic, social and residential challenges (Bernier, Larose, & Whipple, 2005). However, the negative feelings and strain seems temporary for most students. When new relationships are established, the homesickness fades away; students have their identity confirmed, their self-esteem improves and they attain a sense of control (Larose & Boivin, 1998).

The transition to university/college is generally viewed as a positive step in life that offers many opportunities (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2001). Although college students living in lodgings experience reduced social support and an increase in anxiety and depression, they also experience a better relationship with their parents as daily hassles and conflicts decreases (Bernier et al., 2005; Larose & Boivin, 1998). A study in the US found that college students who had higher levels of both connectedness and separateness had better psychological well-being during the transition to college, suggesting that there is a benefit to being simultaneously connected and independent from parents, providing a basis for personal growth towards becoming functionally independent. (Kenyon & Koerner, 2007).

In summary, previous studies have shown that the transition to senior high school at the age of 15-16 and moving away from home at the age of 19 – 20 to go to college/university both have positive and negative effects on adolescents. However, there is little knowledge about how younger adolescents at the age of 15 to 16 experience the transition of leaving

home to live alone when attending senior high school. As most studies utilize quantitative methods, we know little about the meaning and perception of the transition experience from the students' perspective as they both change schools and move from home. To increase knowledge of this transition, we need a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, the purpose of the study is to explore the meaning of living in lodgings during senior high school, asking how the adolescents experience their life in lodgings. This knowledge will be of importance for school nurses aiming to increase the well-being and prevent mental health problems among lodgers during this changing time in their lives.

Method

We adopted a qualitative design within the tradition of phenomenological hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1979). Leaning on both phenomenology and hermeneutic, this approach allows for elucidating and interpreting essential meanings as they are lived in human experience (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to capture meanings from texts produced from interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Due to a longer intermission in the PhD study of the first author, interviews were performed both in 2009 and in 2016. The Regional Research Ethics Committee of Central Norway (REC central) approved the study in 2009 (REK: 4.2008.2240), and The Norwegian Social Science Data Services granted permission for research in 2016 (No 49420).

Participants and Recruitment Procedure

We aimed at recruiting participants who lived in lodgings and represented a wide range of adolescents regarding gender, age and study program. Three senior high schools in the rural central Norway (Nord-Trøndelag County) were contacted and asked for permission to carry out the study in 2009; two of the schools were asked again in 2016. All of the first and second year students living in lodgings were invited to a meeting where they were provided with further information. Afterwards they could sign up to participate in the study. The inclusion

criterion was that the students had at least one semester's experience of living in lodgings. The students who consented to participate were invited for a short orientation with the first author where they were given more information and the opportunity to ask questions.

Twenty-one adolescents of both gender and from different study programs participated in the study, eleven during the winter of 2009 and ten during the autumn of 2016, respectively (Table 1). The participants represented both first and second year students, and had between 6 and 20 months of experience as lodgers. Some of them moved away from home at the age of 15, but all of the participants were between 16 and 18 years of age at the time of the interviews. Eight of them lived alone as the only lodger in a private house, while thirteen lived together with other lodgers, sharing kitchen, bathroom and perhaps a living room.

Data Collection

Due to the participants' age, it was vital that they felt comfortable to tell their story. Hence, all interviews were conducted at times and locations suggested by the participants, most often in a pleasant room at the school or at the participants' lodgings. The first author performed all interviews using a narrative approach. Every interview started with some broad conversation where the participants provided their background information, described their physical living conditions (their room) and their relationship to the host/landlord. Then, the participants were asked to narrate about an ordinary day, describing in detail what they usually do during the day, from getting up in the morning until falling asleep at night. The interviewer supported and encouraged the participants by nodding, providing positive comments like "That was interesting; please tell me more", and asking individual follow-up questions. The intention was to capture various aspects of living in lodgings. Some of the participants had very rich descriptions and narrated thoroughly about their experiences, while others were less spontaneous in their narrative.

The same interview guide and procedures were used both in 2009 and in 2016. The interviews ranged from 48 to 90 minutes, with most of them (16 of 21) lasting between 60 and 80 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim into text.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the study both orally and in writing. They were asked to provide a written informed consent. Participants under the age of 18 received an information letter for their parents to sign. They were informed that it was possible to withdraw from the study at any time, and that all personal data would be anonymized and that they were guaranteed strict confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Our phenomenological hermeneutical approach (Ricoeur, 1979) was used to capture the participants' lived experience and explore the meaning of living in lodgings during senior high school. The method used is described by Lindseth & Norberg (2004), and combines phenomenological descriptions and hermeneutical interpretation in a process consisting of three phases: a *naïve* (open and initial) reading, a *thematic* structural analyses, and finally a *comprehensive* understanding.

In the naïve reading, the text was read several times in order to grasp its meaning as a whole (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The first author attempted to reach an initial understanding of living in lodgings at the age of 15 through 18. During this naïve reading, the first author moved from a natural attitude to a phenomenologically more open attitude in which the phenomenon of living in lodgings should be allowed to appear to the mind in its meaning structure. The naïve (initial) understanding was regarded as a first conjecture, which had to be validated through the *thematic* structural analyses.

In the thematic structural analysis, the text was scrutinized to identify meaning units. The meaning units were re-read thoroughly and considered against the background of the

naïve understanding. Next, the meanings units were condensed; that is, the essential meaning of each meaning unit was expressed in everyday words as concisely as possible. The condensed meaning units were reflected on regarding similarities and differences. They were then sorted, and all similar meaning units were further condensed and abstracted into themes and subthemes. During the structural analysis, the first and second author tried to view the text openly. The authors decontextualised the meaning units from the text as a whole; that is, we considered all text parts constituting a meaning unit as independently as possible from their context in the text. Then the themes were considered in relation to the naïve understanding as a means to validate the naïve understanding.

Based upon the validated initial reading and the thematic structural analyses, an interpreted whole was formulated (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). In this third and final phase, all three authors aimed to reach a comprehensive understanding by viewing the whole in light of its parts and the parts in light of the whole, finally perceiving the text in light of theory chosen for this purpose. The authors' pre-understandings were taken into account and reflected upon by constant discussions between the authors during the analysis process.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings based on the three phases of analysis; a naïve reading, a thematic structural analysis and finally a comprehensive understanding.

Naïve Understanding

Adolescents living in lodgings at this age experience many significant life changes. They experience stress and busyness; the way of living requires a great deal of energy. There is a lot to be done and many decisions to make during the week. They have to prioritize, standing between choices and dilemmas, e.g. if they should stay for the weekend and be with friends or visit their families. They experience being responsible for most aspects of their life, unlike what they were used to when they were taken care of by their parents. At the same time, they

experience feeling alone and missing their families, the sounds of family life and all the daily routines at home. Further, they experience a need for socializing and social cohesion. Finding someone with mutual interests, being together with friends and being active on social media seems very important, in order to feel comfortable and to avoid feeling lonely. The adolescents experience feelings of freedom, independence and increased self-confidence. They can decide what to do and what not to do without asking their parents for permission, and they learn how to manage their own life. At the same time, they experience challenges related to economy, food and housekeeping, self-discipline and setting limits. The naïve understanding of the text shows that adolescents lived experiences in lodgings is challenging in many ways, but provides a basis for personal growth and development.

Structural Understanding

The structural analysis revealed four themes reflecting contrasting elements of the adolescents lived experience: 1. Striving between controlling time and being controlled by time, 2.Striving between finding comfort in being alone and feeling left alone, 3.Striving between being independent and being taken care of, and 4. Striving between leaving and finding home. The themes had eleven subthemes in total (Table 2).

Striving between controlling time and being controlled by time. This theme can be described as a dimension were the adolescents experience life in lodgings as being busy and stressful with many tasks, decisions, dilemmas and challenges to deal with - like time control their life (not being able to use their time as they wish), to a state where life has settled and is characterized by routines, structure and a sense of rhythm. The theme involve two subthemes: losing track and creating daily routines.

Loosing track. The informants experience several challenges. Life has become very busy and there is a lot to do during the week, things they did not need to think about when they lived at home. They now plan for meals, shop for food, consider durability of foods and

prepare all meals, wash clothes, maintain the housekeeping and budget their finances. In addition, they have to find time for homework and school preparation, keep appointments and make time to get together with friends and join leisure activities. Setting limits is an aspect in this, and it is not easy to distribute time reasonably. Periodically they feel short on time and somewhat off track and overwhelmed by tasks and expectations.

> Mona (16): To make dinner, do the dishes, and wash the clothes and to fold the clothes and clean my room that makes me really tired, but that's how it is. Then homework… it will be eight o'clock before I have finished everything, but then I am hungry, and irritated that I have to be hungry, because it is so hard to make food all the time. You have to use so much energy to figure out what to make and just think about… no, I will not use so much kitchenware because then I have to wash the dishes afterwards…

Creating daily routines. In the beginning, the adolescents do not have a full picture of their new life. The days goes fast, and some experience the situation as somewhat chaotic. Little by little, the everyday life fall into a certain rhythm. The adolescents describe how they develop routines during the first semester, which helps them organize their new lives and adds a sense of structure and control of time. Some have morning routines, a calm and regular start of the day brings about feelings of being in control. Different routines are developed and described, such as shopping every Monday after school, washing clothes every Thursday or eating dinner at half past four every afternoon. Likewise, some lodgers have similar routines and rhythms every day, such as relaxing one hour in front of the TV after school, preparing and eating dinner, washing the dishes and drinking coffee, then homework, and in the evening do some exercise, visit friends or watch TV before bedtime. These routines make the adolescents feel in control and brings about a kind of predictability that make them feel safe.

> Kristin (17): The daily routines actually makes me feel good. You sort of relax when you know that this is how it's going to be, and you don't wonder what you will do after school if you understand, you feel safe in your room and you don't feel tense or something in lodgings, I think that is very good.

Striving between finding comfort in being alone and feeling left alone. This theme can be described as a dimension of alternating feelings where the adolescents experience life

from being pleasant and valuable with regards to having time and space on their own, to a state where life is characterized by feelings of loss and loneliness. The theme involves three subthemes: being relaxed, missing family and social contact, and feeling lonely.

Being relaxed. Adolescents who live in lodgings spend a lot of time alone. Some of them experience a kind of well-being in being alone, as they feel surrounded by people at school and at home. They view it as rather nice to have the opportunity to draw back from everything, and have peaceful quiet time for themselves. They find comfort in their own company, listening to music, reading a book or letting their thoughts flow. Some lodgers experience having time on their own as necessary to get in touch with their inner thoughts.

> Lise (17): I am often together with friends and I have many visitors, but I try to be less social in a way. Don't misunderstand, but in a way I feel like spending more time on my own. I am so easily stressed and I want to be social and I want to be together with people. I am losing myself a bit, and that scares me. Therefore, I have decided to try to avoid that. Be logged out, lie in bed and read a book, listen to music. Just philosophize, think… just exist… because that is very, very nice.

Most informants experience a need to be alone to focus on their homework, but for some of them, being alone is something necessary to relax, recover and mobilize energy. As life in lodgings can be busy and stressful, they appreciate moments of their own, trying to find ways to relax, or just choosing to be alone to gain energy for the upcoming week.

> Gunnar (17): When I am alone, I use to sit in the living room because it has a fireplace with a wood fire. I use to sit down and light up the fire. I think that is very nice. It is my snuggery. Especially if I just… yes, it is also a reason why I sit nearby the fireplace that I can sit and just look at the flames… it is very relaxing and comfortable

Missing family and social contact. Living in lodgings means missing family and social contact with friends. Even when life in general is busy, they experience periods of being alone and strongly feel the lack of close relationships to their family or friends. For some, it is related to meals, and they miss the fellowship around the table. For others it is related to just knowing that there are somebody there, the sounds and voices of family life that makes them feel safe. They also miss the security of someone familiar to talk to if needed.

Mona (16): I remember that we always sat together at the dinner table, and we talked and we asked "How was your day?" You ate without thinking about that you were eating. Now I sit alone…You just think about your plate, and you sit on your own, staring into the wall. I feel I eat more when I am together with other people…

Feeling lonely. Sometimes the certainty of being alone makes them feel lonely. They describe feelings of being left alone in the world; there is nobody to talk to and nobody that care for them. These feelings arise when they have nothing to do or when all their friends are occupied with something else. Feelings of loneliness might also appear in situations where they feel weak, sad or sick.

Tom (16): Actually, I feel lonely quite often. Let us say I speak with very many friends, ask if they can come to visit, but everyone is busy… then I feel very lonely, even if the girl next door is there. I am that kind of person. If I feel alone, I very easily get emotional and sentimental and the whole package (overwhelmed of sad feelings).

Striving between being independent and being taken care of. This theme has three subthemes: Being independent and responsible, Learning and growing through experience, and Receiving care and support. The theme presents how the lodgers experience life as a time of fast learning and personal growth on the path to become an adult. At the same time, they still need care and support from their family.

Being independent and responsible. All adolescents tell stories about the life in lodgings as being free and independent. They feel free to do whatever they want without asking their parents, and they don't have to fit or adjust to family rules any more. They really appreciate the feeling of freedom, but for some, their parents' rules and limits are still present.

Per (17): I don't need to ask if I want to go somewhere, I don't need to ask when to be back home. I don't need to ask if I can have visitors… I can skip eating dinner, but that is not an option when I am home… to drop eating dinner

To be independent is to be autonomous and make decisions. However, it is also about gaining self-confidence, being self-reliant and being able to fix things that their parents used to do. Some adolescents describe becoming less shy and withdrawn. In addition to feelings of independence, the adolescents increase their sense of responsibility. Taking on responsibility

for their own finances is a big and demanding issue. They seem responsible for taking care of themselves in terms of being self-disciplined, getting enough nutritious food, completing their homework, getting sufficient sleep, setting limits, and engaging in social life.

> Espen (17): I usually go to bed late, but at the same time I know it is good for me to get in bed now… for my body's sake. Between one and three o'clock - it's late. If I can go to bed between eleven and one o'clock, then it's ok. Because if I fall asleep before one o'clock then I get about seven hours sleep. It is good, occasionally, to feel that I get in bed on time.

Being responsible also means prioritizing and making plans. The students experience a need to determine what is important to do, what they need to accomplish, and what can wait. Being responsible is both demanding and satisfactory; some of the adolescents express a sense of satisfaction with being responsible for their own place, housekeeping and finances, however, others find it strenuous.

> Tom (16): I oversleep and I just consider, shall I bother to go to school to day? Shouldn't I just say I am sick? Then I know it is a bit shameful to always be late and I feel that I disappoint the teacher and I disappoint myself. So I consider it for a long time; to choose the easy way and continue to stay in bed, or to jump into the shower and be late for school but be fresh? Should I just go to school because I have to go to school? I don't feel like leaving the bed, but it is my responsibility to go to school

Learning and growing through experience. The lodgers learn about housekeeping, about themselves and how to be responsible. They learn by doing, little by little or by trying and failing. They might get advice from their parents, but mostly they have to figure out for themselves what to do. In the beginning, they struggle, but they have a steep positive learning curve, and feel satisfied when they can cope with different challenges. This learning process is experienced as demanding, but they are aware of their personal growth in regard to becoming more patient, confident, responsible and mature.

> Silje (16): You learn a lot. I could not wash clothes before I moved into lodgings. Mom tried to force me to learn: You must learn what is 30 degrees dark and 40 degrees light. I got a short introduction, tried by myself, and little by little, that is how you learn stepwise, and it becomes much more fun as well. I see that I can manage. The feeling of coping is very good.

Receiving care and support. Although the lodgers become independent and learn to manage on their own, they still receive support from their parents. While they value their freedom and independence, they speak warmly about their parents, always available for help and advice. Some of the lodgers go home every weekend; they get their clothes washed and get food or money for the next week. Equally important is the confidence in knowing that the parents always support you if needed. Some students still need to be taken care of to a certain extent, e.g. in situations where they need health services. They express both a lack of and a need for their parents support and comfort. The lodgers also receive support and care from their teachers and other adults, which provides a feeling of safety and confirmation.

> Vera (16): My teacher told me I could talk to the school counsellor not only about studies, but also about things in life, and then I decided to go to a grownup person. It is something else than turning to a friend. The first time we talked about how I should handle the situation, and how it sometimes was too much worries.

Striving between leaving home and finding home. This theme has three subthemes: Altered relationship with family, Creating one's own home, and Finding oneself. The theme describe the adolescents' experiences of life in lodgings from being uprooted and forced to deal with changes in their relations with home and family, to finding new home in meanings of security and identity.

Altered relationships with family. Moving into lodgings means changes in many ways, and some of the adolescents are very aware that the family life to which they have grown accustomed will not be the same again. They all experience a change in their family relationship. First, there is less quarrelling, nagging, and fewer conflicts with parents and/or siblings. After moving, they become more like equals, and appreciate their parents' guidance or their siblings' need for contact. Second, the adolescents express a mutual respect, and indicate that they better understand their parents. In addition, they experience that their parents have more confidence in them than previously. Some lodgers describe an altered role

in the family, e.g. siblings taking over their room, turning from "enemy" to favorite sibling, and several find themselves in the new role of counsellor for their younger siblings.

> Vera (16): Of course, I sense I have another role in the family. In the beginning, they sold the car with seven seats. We had a Chrysler with seven seats, but they sold it, so they only had the BMW with five seats. So I said, "No, I am not a part of the family any more", but… no, it is the way it will be. But I don't bother argue with my siblings when I am home, and they think it is much more fun to see me now. They jump on me when I enter the door, and I find that very amusing.

Creating one's own home. Most of the lodgers make an effort to make their new place to live as homey and practical as possible. For some it is not so important how it looks, but it is important to feel a sense of "this is my space". Interior decorating is essential in the process of creating their own place. For some it is important to bring things that remind them of home or tell their own familiar story, for others it is important to find their own style and buy new things for their future life outside the family. All lodgers express that they are eager to create a place where they can relax, find comfort, and being practical. However, the homey feeling is more important than practical solutions.

> Frank (18): I own everything myself. I have bought a sofa… two sofas and table, TV table, vitrine cabinet, and then I bought a dining table and dining chairs - not new because the chairs costs 1000 kroner a piece but I got them cheap. And then I have bought …. I own almost every kind of kitchen utensil and a vacuum cleaner and so on. I also bought two large speakers to use as a desk, and I thought I have to fix this, so I made myself a desk. I have done everything myself. It's my flat.

Finding oneself. The lodgers' narratives describe the life in lodgings as a process, of not only learning, but also a process of seeking and finding a new identity. Facing new and different challenges during the life in lodgings, they seem to gradually get to know themselves better. As one student stated, it is all about "knowing who you are". They become aware of what they value and appreciate in life, and gained more confidence in arguing for their opinions. Some of them tell stories about hard days, difficult thoughts and tough times, and of how they learn to listen to their own body and find ways to deal with this to feel better again.

> Tom (16): It is more cowardly to hide your tears than show them to people, because that's when you show yourself when you are real and vulnerable. When you hide, then

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you only show an appearance or façade. I hate people to perceive me… my mood as anything else than what it really is. If I am grumpy or sad one day at school, I don't go around smiling, being a best friend and so on. No, I let them know that today I am not in a good mood. I have experienced that I prefer people to be aware of how I feel

Comprehensive Understanding and Discussion

Attending high school, relocating and experiencing maturation initiates a multidimensional transition among the adolescents. Being both developmental and situational in nature, this transition encompasses striving between contrasting experiences. Our analysis suggests that the lodgers' lived experiences mean alternating between feeling connected and disconnected to time, social life, independence development and self. These experiences may be seen as inevitable in the process of growing up. Still, their experiences and responses reveal a special kind of transition as the adolescents strive between growth and potential unhealthy outcomes.

However, discussing the objective of our study: to explore and interpret the lived experience of adolescents living in lodgings during senior high school; the comprehensive understanding based on the analysis can be understood and discussed from four themes: the adolescents experience changes and processes related to time, social life, independence development and self. Our findings provide a basis for discussing this within the framework of the transitions theory of Meleis et al. (2000, 2010), emphasizing the concepts of disconnectedness and feeling connected in relation to the four main themes revealed in the analysis.

A Transitional Change: Life as an Adolescent Living in Lodgings

The lodgers experience comprehensive transitions. Vulnerability is related to transition experiences that expose individuals to potential damage or unhealthy coping (Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias, & Schumacher, 2000). Our findings highlights that these transitions opens multidimensional processes as the adolescents are disconnected from a variety of basic elements of importance for the individual's feeling of safety and security (Meleis, 2010).

Striving within the dimension of time. The lodgers experience challenges related to time, due to changes in their daily routines and rhythm of life. They compare the present busy life in lodgings with their former life at home, without duties concerning housekeeping, preparing food, shopping and finances. These comparisons are a way of situating themselves in terms of time (Meleis et al., 2000). From a perspective of disconnectedness (Meleis, 2010), the lodgers experience disruptions in routines that allow them to feel safe and secure; the lodgers strive to take control of time. They are controlled by time, understood as being disconnected from the track that bring them to achieve their goals, complete all their tasks and conduct their activities. Losing track of time, they experience high levels of stress and busyness, making them vulnerable in regard to mental health. Research shows that time-related demands for college students are associated with higher stress levels (van der Meer, Jansen, & Torenbeek, 2010; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005).

In the long run, struggles with control of time and perceived stress can have serious consequences such as underachievement, dropping out of school (Lowe & Cook, 2003) and depression (Pengilly & Dowd, 2000). On the contrary, when the lodgers are in control of time, and on track with the routines and daily life rhythm, the predictability makes the adolescents feel well, safe and in control. The findings suggests that the lodgers evolve over time, striving to find ways to handle a large number of tasks by developing daily routines and finding a rhythm that makes them feel connected to time. According to Meleis (2000), this is a response that characterizes healthy transition. Häfner et al. (2015) confirm that perceived stress decreases as perceived control of time increases. There are individual differences as some lodgers develop routines and find ways to structure time during the first months, while others hardly develop any routines after two years in lodgings. Creating routines involves thinking and planning, and developing strategies for managing their daily lives increases their level of confidence; another response that characterize a healthy transition (Meleis et al., 2000).

Striving within the dimension of social life. Adolescents living in lodgings experience changes in social life due to disconnectedness (Meleis et al., 2000), as they experience disruptions in both contact and relationships with family and friends. Close relationships and daily communication are important for adolescents to feel well (Offer, 2013), and these lodgers strive to find a balance between time on their own to relax and the need for social contact to avoid feeling lonely. Decreased support and contact with parents (Bogard, 2005) and friends (Eldeleklioglu, 2006) are shown to be associated with higher levels of depression. For most of the lodgers, there is a constant imaginary movement (Messias, 1997) back and forth between home and lodgings, as they make comparisons between the life in lodgings and at home regarding relaxation, social contact, availability of support and fellowship around meals. Comparisons make the lodgers vulnerable as they become aware of their lack of close relationships, sitting alone while eating their meals or missing conversations before bedtime. Thus, continuous connections with family and friends are important to promote a feeling of safety (Meleis et al., 2000). Making new contacts and connections are equally important as new schoolmates and friends gradually meet each other's needs for social contact, making the adolescents less vulnerable to mental health problems (Eldeleklioglu, 2006). Over time and to a varying extent, the lodgers become more confident in being alone. They can relax, and experience being able take care of their own needs with regards to maintaining energy or getting in touch with their inner thoughts, and this self-awareness is important for their wellbeing (Ram Bilas, Arun, & Pardeep, 2013).

Striving within the dimension of independence development. When moving away from home, there is a disconnectedness in relation to daily support from family, teachers and friends, implying a discrepancy between the adolescents' needs for support and the availability of support when facing a new situation. Living in lodgings both requires and promotes the development of independence. However, the lodgers strive to take responsibility

when meeting new demands. They are vulnerable due to a lack of skills and knowledge; and they lack emotional support and confirmation. Research confirms that lodgers experience decreased support from parents and friends simultaneously as the responsibility to manage on their own increases (Cleary et al., 2011). Lessened support from parents and classmates is found to contribute to depression among adolescents (Auerbach, Bigda-Peyton, Eberhart, Webb, & Ho, 2011). Thus, continuing connection to family and friends is essential for them to feel safe (Meleis et al., 2000). However, new connections will gradually provide support and care. Transitions open opportunities to develop new relationships (Cleary et al., 2011), and growing independence from parents (Kenyon & Koerner, 2007). The lodgers in our study value the freedom they experience, but they are aware of the responsibility that lies in the freedom from being monitored by their parents, and express a sense of ambivalence, as they want to be independent, yet still need parental guidance and care. Still, independence grows rapidly, but also individually, as some lodgers need to be taken care of to a greater extent than others. The lodgers express being independent and responsible as very satisfactory, this might be viewed as an increase in their level of confidence (Meleis et al., 2000).

Striving within the dimension of self. The lodgers experience environmental changes and losses of meaningful objects as they move into lodgings. There is a disconnectedness in relation to home and self, being uprooted from their former lives/homes and experiencing an altered role in the family. This might mean a loss of familiar reference points and uncertainty as they strive to find a new state of home and security in the process of creating their own home and redefining their identity. The process of leaving home can only be understood in light of meanings attached to "home", as home is a space that consists of physical places, social practices and mental meaning (Lahelma & Gordon, 2003). In creating their own home, some lodgers express the importance of being connected to their family and home of origin, as the interior decoration (physical places) consists of objects that have a special meaning.

Home as a mental space is a place of safety, privacy and independence through which people construct their relationship to their surroundings (Lahelma & Gordon, 2003). While some lodgers feel comfortable and safe within their new home after a short period, others continue to strive to feel safe and well. They extend the process of leaving home by returning home every weekend, probably giving them a needed feeling of belonging. According to the theory of transition (Meleis et al., 2000), feeling connected to one's family is important and might ease the transition process of leaving home. Similarly, making connections with new friends and schoolmates are vital in the process of finding oneself, as peer interactions make the lodgers aware of who they are (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2012). The lodgers compare their role in the family, recognizing that their parents treat them more like equals and have more confidence in them than previously. This helps the adolescents to situate themselves, in terms of who they are in regard to becoming responsible, independent and autonomous individuals (Meleis et al., 2000).

Limitations and methodological considerations

This study, based on a sample of 21 Norwegian adolescents living in lodgings in rural Norway, offers an in-depth understanding of what it means to live in lodgings, Qualitative inquiry seeks to widen understanding, and generalization is not a goal. Our purpose was to gain knowledge about a lived experience of which little is known. Data were collected at eight-year intervals. The sample consists of participants of both genders, from varying study programs and with different domicile origins, but none came from or moved to a city larger than 22 000 inhabitants. With these limitations in mind, our data are rich due to the participants' eagerness to share their stories and experiences. In addition, the time interval revealed a kind of stability in the experiences of living in lodgings over time. Regarding interpretation of data, Ricoeur (1979) asserted that a text can always be understood differently but that some interpretations may be more probable than others. Ricoeur's interpretation

theory, described by Lindseth and Norberg (2004), offers a stepwise model presenting the analysis as transparently as possible. The authors have reflected on and critically worked with the analysis until a consensus was reached. The trustworthiness of this study is linked to the stepwise planning and transparency in design and implementation. As in any qualitative study, the authors' pre-understandings and professional experiences have influenced the analysis and interpretation. All three authors have background as nurses, and the first author has experience working as a school nurse and head of studies in high school settings.

Conclusion and implications

This study illuminates the meaning of living in lodgings during senior high school, revealing four main themes, involving both positive and negative experiences and aspects of living in lodgings. Our findings stress the importance of a heightened awareness towards the vulnerability of these adolescents regarding their well-being. The transition to a new school and a new life in lodgings is a critical period of change and disconnectedness, which demands several processes and developmental tasks within the dimensions of time, social life, independence development and self. School nurses and school personnel are urged to raise their awareness of the experience during this transition, and to facilitate connectedness for the lodgers to provide healthy outcomes of the transition. Our findings indicate that interventions should be directed towards alleviating the disruption in relationships and promoting development of new relationships. Class teachers could give school nurses an account of lodgers in their classes, followed by invitations to meet the school nurse, individually or in groups. Small groups of lodgers meeting regularly the first semester, emphasizing on positive and challenging experiences, might promote support and feelings of connectedness. Anticipatory guidance before the moving transition might be effective in preparing students for the changes they may experience, focusing on the adolescents own expectations, how they

can practice knowledge and skills towards e.g. housekeeping, sleeping habits, planning and finances, and from whom and were they can seek support and help if needed. Frequent supportive conversations during the first semester focusing on topics and processes highlighted of the lodgers (described within the four dimensions), in addition to assessing the lodgers for ineffective self-care, might be pivotal in facilitating the transition, and might function as a safety net, as the lodgers would feel a connection to an adult. School nurses might also provide connection to a caring person, being there for the lodgers, showing genuinely interests. For further research, we recommend studies exploring what lodgers themselves experience to be of importance for their well-being and mental health, including factors helping them through different challenges during their lives in lodgings.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The Authors declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the 21 participants

Participants	Gender/age	Living (other lodgers)	Study programme	Moved from → to
1 – "Hilde"	F/18	Alone	Voc. education program	City → City
2 – "Ola"	M/18	Alone	Voc. education program	Countryside → City
3 – "Bente"	F/18	Alone	General studies	City → City
4 – "Arne"	M/18	Together (3)	General studies	Countryside → City
5 – "Espen"	M/18	Together (2)	General studies/music	City → Countryside
6 – "Silje"	F/16	Together (1)	General studies/music	City → Countryside
7 – "Per"	M/17	Together (2)	General studies/Drama	Countrys. → Countrys.
8 – "Lise"	F/17	Together (1)	General studies/music	Countrys. → Countrys.
9 – "Gunnar"	M/17	Together (3)	General studies/Drama	Countrys. → Countrys.
10 – "Mari"	F/18	Together (1)	General studies/sports	Countrys. → Countrys.
11 – "Vera"	F/16	Alone	General studies/sports	Countrys. → Countrys.
12 – "Tom"	M/16	Together (1)	General studies	Countryside → City
13 – "Erik"	M/16	Alone	General studies/music	Countryside → City
14 – "Kristin	F/18	Together (2)	Voc. education program	Countryside → City
15 – "Anne"	F/17	Alone	General studies	Countryside → City
16 – "Mona"	F/16	Together (2)	General studies	Countryside → City
17 – "Clara"	F/17	Together (3)	Voc. education program	City → City
18 – "Dordi"	F/17	Together (1)	Voc. education program	Countryside → City
19 – "Frank"	M/18	Together (1)	Voc. education program	Countryside → City
20 - "Nina"	F/17	Alone	Voc. education program	Countryside → City
21 – "Yngve"	M/17	Alone	Voc. education program	Countryside → City

Table 2 Examples of interview text connected to themes and subthemes from the structural analysis

Interview text	Subtheme	Theme
Anne (16): These routines ant the rhythm during the week in lodgings… yes it is something I am looking forward to, and I feel that I… time goes faster in a way	Creating daily routines	Striving between controlling time and
Erik 16: It takes a long time to wash clothes, it takes a long time to dry clothes, … for example if you need clothes for a special occasion and they must be ready, then suddenly you have twenty T-shirts and no underwear, and then you have a lot of clothes but not a single towel… it's much more logistic than you would think	Loosing track	being controlled by time
Vera (16): I thought about moving together with somebody, but I feel so comfortable alone because I am almost never alone anyway. So when I am alone it is very nice and comfortable	Being relaxed	Striving between finding comfort in being alone and feeling left alone
Hilde (18): I never make a proper dinner when I'm alone, because I don't think… it is not so… dinner is not so nice then, eating alone	Missing family and social contact	
Mona (16): I often feel lonely if I did not do very much… if I just lie in bed or just feel… I haven't anyone to talk to, I have not been social and then it's like… I just lie here and I feel lonely	Feeling lonely	

Clara (18): When I moved, I got to start over again in a way… I can show myself in another way, I have become more independent and know I can fix things by myself.	Being independent and responsible	Striving between being independent
Erik (16): A credit card is not very useful for an adolescent in the beginning of managing his own finances, but after trying and failing a couple of times I learned. I used eight thousand kroner for food in a month, I used three thousand the next month	Learning and growing through experience	and being taken care of
Mari (18): I talk a lot with my Mom, she is a mentor to me. Before it was like "you have to do this and that", but now is more like "what would you have done yourself"	Receiving care and support from family	
Clara (17): We are still a family, but I feel it's a kind of… I am not there… I don't know how to express this, but yes, they live their own life	Altered relationship to family	Striving between leaving home and finding home
Lise (17): I have refurnished the room. My shelves… I have many things that reminds me of journeys and friends and…, everything in my room means something to me.	Creating one's own home	
Espen (18): I have found myself some more even if it's far from finished, I should say, you socialize your entire life… but you know your weak sides and your strong sides	Finding oneself	