

Research Programme & Lessons Learned in Building a Care Leaving Research Agenda



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Approach to the presentation

- **Research Programme**

- Why and how I started
- What's been done
 - Independent research
 - Collaborative initiatives
- Where we hope to go
 - Current projects

- **Lessons Learned**

- Interrelated personal and professional experience
- Jordanian context



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Research Programme: Why and how I started

- Temporary services for severely abused children
- Informally remaining in contact with some that were transferred to long-term care provided the impetus
- No minimum care standards, no post-care support legislation, limited ad-hoc formal supports, no leaving care research (focused on negative circumstances of care homes) (in Jordan and MENA)
- Professionalisation of social work remains to be at a nascent stage – improving
- Desire to become more specialised in this field



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Research Programme: How I started – PhD

- 'Making the Transition from Residential Care to Adulthood: The Experience of Jordanian Care Leavers'
- Aim was to gain understanding of the experiences of young people making the transition from residential care to adulthood
- Socio-legal context
- Qualitative and exploratory with 42 participants (21 females, 21 males)
 - Average 14 years in care (range 2-21 years)
 - 89% admitted before age 10
 - 1 month – 10 years out of care
 - 43% unknown / concealed families



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Research Programme: Main PhD Findings

1. Similar transitional experiences in wider literature

- Shed light on the multiple structures that influence trajectories
 - Care system and socio-economic contexts
- Insecure and troubled transitions and struggled with important life domains
 - Employment, education, finances, a weak support network
 - Often stigmatised identity that increased already high risk of marginalization



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Research Programme: Main PhD Findings

2. Distinct finding

- Pervasive influence of the cultural context (particularly for those from unknown families)
- Key characteristics dominate and shape Jordan's social and sociolegal system
 - Patriarchal and honour-bound, patrilineal, collectivist
- Understanding of self is being part of a unit (kin group) vs. as an individual
- Central to Arab concept of personhood, moral worth and social place (Rosen, 2006)



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Research Programme: Main PhD Findings

3. Theoretical implications

Implications on Care Leavers – Forced to be individual in a collectivist society

- Being part of kin group comes with privileges – if not entitlements –
- The institutional severing of all ties – severs ‘entitlements’ that come with family/tribal affiliation, ascribed power, access, and belonging
- A forced individuality is a continuous strain that’s over and beyond the existing challenges inherent in transitioning from care
- Theoretical implications focus on the inclusion of cultural context within frameworks pertaining to care leavers



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Research Programme: Individual Research Projects Follow-up Study (Wave 2)

- In response to international calls- the need to move beyond
 - ... early years - longer term development (Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan 2015: 186)
 - ... a general deficit-based view (Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan 2015, Courtney & Hughes-Hearing 2005)
 - For a global and shared understanding - move beyond largely West-based literature and extend enquiry to countries and cultures in the developing world (Collins & Tuyen, 2016; Pinkerton, 2011)
- Jordanian context: Increased awareness reflected in the development of post-care services (Al Aman Fund, Governmental Unit, budding NGOs that include care leavers as populations to serve)
 - Aims of Wave 2
 - Contribute to longitudinal research, international research especially from developing economies / Arab
 - Increase knowledge about longer-term developments
 - What promotes positive care leaver experiences and factors that mitigate marginalisation
 - 29/42, 43% unknown/concealed families, 5-19 years out of care



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Research Programme: Individual Research Projects Follow-up Study (Wave 2) – main findings

- The combination of formal and informal supports contributed to positive turning points and promoting resilience
- Although not straightforward, the increase in formal supports, and those extended to longer-term care leavers had a significant impact
 - Housing & Home Ownership
 - Higher Education Scholarships
 - Relationships with community not connected with care
- A number of practice, policy and research implications



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Research Programme: Individual Research Projects Follow-up Study (Wave 2) – main findings

- Two central messages for Jordan (and others?)
- 1. Improving longer-term outcomes and decreasing gaps between care leavers and peers in society at large requires a shift from the paradigm of limiting services due to concerns about prolonged dependence to one that focuses on longer-term welfare
- 2. As detrimental as they may be, deeply rooted cultural values and norms do not change rapidly – it is crucial to tackle structures that create and perpetuate marginalisation in addition to mitigating those conditions

.... Currently conducting **Wave 3** (11-20 years post care)



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Research Programme: Collaborative Research Projects

1.' Empowering Care Leavers' (IRC KHF – US AID Funded) (2015 – 2017)

- To identify and address the legal and social inequalities and discrimination faced by young people with a care history, to develop a formally coordinated support system (Gov't and civil society)
- Develop evidence-based recommendations for national stakeholders and advocate for policies
- Research component – mixed methods – including peer-to-peer research – based on social identity theory



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Research Programme: Collaborative Research Projects



1. 'Empowering Care Leavers' (IRC KHF – US AID Funded) (2015 – 2017) – outcomes

- Development of formal network comprised of civil society organisations that support care leavers (individual pathway planning, case management)
- Kit for Youth Deprived of Family Ties upon becoming Care Leavers, digital www.albedaya.org (also to raise awareness about discrimination)

Media and Civil Society

- Awareness raising via media and in local communities (workshops with media, monitoring for discriminatory terminology)
- Roundtables with policy makers and national stakeholders (no longer using 'illegitimate child' – 'Youth deprived of family ties')

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Research Programme: Collaborative Research Projects

2. Development and institutionalisation of after care services and reintegration programmes (young people in care, care leavers and female survivors of gender-based violence)

Child Frontiers International - funded by UNICEF Jordan Country Office (Gov't call)

- Currently in the design phase
- **Preliminary Research Questions**
 - How are effective reintegration and aftercare defined in Jordan?
 - How are reintegration and aftercare currently supported in Jordan?
 - What are the support needs of women, children and young people for effective reintegration and aftercare?



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Lessons Learned in Building Research Agenda

- Subjective experience within the Jordanian context
- Increasing attention of care leavers on political agendas is a long-term process
 - Child welfare system is often scrutinised – penetrating gatekeepers is challenging – keep trying for the right time (eg. 10 years post PhD UNICEF is on-board)
 - Continuously involve youth (peer-to-peer research, verification, solidarity)
 - Stay connected to the field and build alliances (locally, and internationally eg. INTRAC)
- Remain committed despite challenges
 - ‘Bite-size’ contributions build foundations
 - We owe it to the young people! Having knowledge is a responsibility.



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Thank you!

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