Abstract

Research activities in the area of care leaving and transition to adulthood, across different types of placements, composition of care-leavers population and national boundaries, consistently report poor outcomes in education and well-being among care-leavers. This social exclusion becomes more severe due to discrimination on the basis of gender, race, nationality and disabilities. Unfortunately, only a limited amount of documented literature is available about these experiences. The collection becomes scantier when it comes to studies from developing countries like Africa, China, South America and India. Therefore, this study captured the preparation and experiences of social reintegration among girls in care and care-leavers. It included different aspects of social reintegration, highlighting the participants’ perception about their present physical, educational, emotional, social and financial status and their expectation of the future.

Two hundred girls from primarily nine residential care homes in the Metropolitan cities of Mumbai and Kolkata were selected for the study. Among them, one hundred girls were presently residing in residential care and preparing for social reintegration; and the other hundred were care-leavers experiencing social reintegration. The study was a phenomenological study which captured both the subjective experiences of participants and the objective experiences of something which they had in common with other girls. It embarked on the path of mixed method and used a Concurrent/Triangulation Mixed Method Design with Merged Results. The researcher felt, that while quantitative data ensured precision in the study, the qualitative data brought richness. For the quantitative aspect, two instruments were developed to measure preparation for social reintegration and experience of social reintegration. The qualitative data was presented through a composite description.

Overall, the girls in care who were preparing for their social reintegration rendered mixed responses. Their level of preparation varied across the different organisations, while some participants were more confident about their forthcoming
transition, others were scared, lost and helpless. Children who had to exit the care system at a younger age felt more confused and powerless. Other factors such as the good educational achievements or ability to pursue higher education, access to a well-paid job, a secure place to stay and savings or financial support increased their confidence for social reintegration. The lack of trust in relationship between the participants and the organisations, made them feel more insecure and vulnerable. The quantitative findings revealed that preparation for social reintegration was positively associated with the age of the girls, their educational qualification, available support network and their self-esteem. In fact, the level of preparation for social reintegration could be predicted by age of the girls and their self-esteem.

Care-leavers associated their present experience of social reintegration strongly with their preparedness to leave care. For some a smooth transition out of care, led to a secure future. For others a sudden withdrawal, complicated their lives, after leaving care. Once again, the preparation and experience of social reintegration among the girls significantly varied with the models of care and the type of residential care homes. The qualitative descriptions showed that the experiences of these girls were affected by the nature of after-care services, type of support network, nature of relationships, career opportunities, cultural moorings and state involvement. The quantitative analysis highlighted a significant association of the experience of the girls with the level of happiness in residential care, preparation for social reintegration, age of leaving care, educational qualification and level of fulfilment of career goals. Their access to support network, comfort level in present accommodation and self-esteem was also positively correlated with their experience of social reintegration.

In the final segment, based on the findings a framework for social reintegration was proposed where the contribution of different actors, such as the residential care home (especially the professional social worker and psychologist), family, educational institution and the state, were highlighted.