

Pathways out of care: Comparisons between Africa and the Global North

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Young people leaving care



- ❖ Social studies
- ❖ Youth studies
- ❖ Youth transitions
- ❖ Care-leaving
 - Aging out of care / Family reunification
 - Residential care / Foster care

International comparisons



- ❖ Care-leaving research in the Global North
 - UK, USA, Australia, Western Europe, former communist European countries
- ❖ Care-leaving research in the Global South
 - Almost invisible
 - Small scale, qualitative studies that can't compete with the large quantitative studies from the North
- ❖ Africa Network of Care-leaving Researchers (ANCR) www.careleaving.com
 - International Research Network on Leaving Care (INTRAC)

Care-leaving in the Global North



- ❖ Smaller populations of children
- ❖ Fewer children in need of care
- ❖ A long tradition of alternative care
- ❖ Higher income and lower inequality
- ❖ Greater welfare resources and systems
- ❖ Culture of 'corporate parenting'
- ❖ Greater role of the State in providing care
- ❖ Going into care negatively stigmatized
- ❖ Care-leavers typically do poorly after leaving care

Care-leaving in the Global South



- ❖ Large populations of children nationally
- ❖ Far more children in need of care, due to Aids, migrant labour, war
- ❖ No cultural tradition of alternative care
- ❖ Low income and (in SA) high inequality
- ❖ Limited (or no) welfare resources and systems
- ❖ A culture of communities taking care of their own
- ❖ Limited role & capacity of the State to provide care
- ❖ Care sometimes seen as a positive opportunity
- ❖ Care-leavers seem to do no worse than their peers

What have we learned in Africa

- Social relationships



- ❖ A network of social supports (family, friends, former teachers and lovers) contributes to better outcomes at one year in SA (Dickens, 2016; cf. Oelofsen, 2015) and continues to predict outcomes at two years (Van Breda, 2016)
- ❖ Foster care-leavers tend to leave the care of extended family in SA (Chiroro et al., 2009)
- ❖ A wide range of support networks are mobilized in Zim (Mhongera & Lombard, 2017) including careworkers (Gwenzi, 2015)
- ❖ Informal support systems (church, staying in touch with the children's home, family and friends) important for care-leavers in Ghana (Frimpong-Manso, 2017)
- ❖ Pro-social friends and their families in Uganda (Luboyera, 2014)
- ❖ Relationships with other former looked after children in Ethiopia (Pryce et al. 2016; Takele, 2017) and Kenya (Roeber, 2011)

What have we learned in Africa

- Social skills



- ❖ Care-leavers in SA show strong ability to build relationships that foster belonging and that help them achieve their goals (Van Breda, 2015)
- ❖ The social skills learned in care do translate into young adulthood, but are adapted and repurposed by care-leavers in SA (Mmusi & Van Breda, 2017)
- ❖ Interpersonal skills (team work) contribute to better outcomes in SA (Dickens, 2016)

What have we learned in Africa

- Future orientation



- ❖ Forward looking processes (spirituality and optimism) contribute to better outcomes at one year in SA (Dickens, 2016)
- ❖ 'Possible selves' provide important building blocks for preparing to leave care in SA (Bond, 2017)
- ❖ Aspirational goals towards the future in SA (Muller et al., 2003; Oelofsen, 2015)
- ❖ Hope to push through difficult times and not give up in Uganda (Luboyera, 2014)
- ❖ Care-leavers express a tenacious hope and self-confidence (Van Breda, 2015)

What have we learned in Africa - Valorisation of education



- ❖ The goal of getting a tertiary education is prominent, and seen as a key to success in life in SA (Oelofsen, 2015)
- ❖ Despite this, in SA is a challenge (Van Breda & Dickens, 2015)
- ❖ Educational access a source of hope in Ethiopia (Bailey et al., 2011)
- ❖ Academic achievement is seen as a key to a successful life after leaving care in Zimbabwe (Gwenzi, 2015)

What have we learned in Africa - Spirituality



- ❖ Belief in God provides courage to keep moving forward among female care-leavers in SA (Hlungwani, 2017; Meyer, 2008; Oelofsen, 2015)

- ❖ All is not rosy for care-leavers in Africa, e.g.
 - Lack of sustainable support networks
 - Unable to access education and employment
 - Housing and food insecurity
- ❖ Much of the research has a bias towards investigating the negative experiences of care-leavers, giving little attention to what care-leavers do, within their social contexts, to advance their journey towards independence
- ❖ The findings in Africa do not contradict those in the Global North

An indigenous approach to care-leaving in Africa



❖ African care-leavers utilise:

Social networks

- ❖ Utilise a range of social skills to work cooperatively with others in their social environment
- ❖ Mobilise a range of informal social networks to be helpful and supportive

Personal resources

- ❖ Draw on spirituality and faith, as well as a community of believers, for support and hope
- ❖ Focus on the future and a tenacious belief that things will improve for them
- ❖ See education as a key investment to secure a brighter future

Implications for decolonial social work practice



- ❖ Foster the capacity of young people to operate effectively in the sociocultural world around them
- ❖ Draw on and nurture the spiritual roots
- ❖ Create opportunities for educational advancement
- ❖ Work to construct compelling but realistic images of their future self
- ❖ Cultivate a range of social networks outside of the care system that continue beyond care

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