

SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR YOUTHS AGING OUT OF RESIDENTIAL CARE TO PROMOTE POSITIVE TRANSITION OUTCOMES – A SCOPING REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This scoping review provides the available evidence on support interventions and networks for youths aging out of child and youth care centres (CYCCs), and makes recommendations for best practice to alleviate the plight of youths leaving CYCCs. Thirteen databases were searched, resulting in the retrieval of 80 articles, 26 of which met the review criteria: English, full-text, peer-reviewed, open-access studies conducted between 2015 and 2020 on social networks and transitional services to youths aging out of residential care. Recommendations are made for policy changes, extending the age of eligibility and strengthening social support networks for youths transitioning into independent living.

Keywords: *child and youth care centres, positive transition outcomes, residential care, support interventions, social support networks, youths aging out of care*

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INTRODUCTION

The transition of youths into adulthood varies significantly in different social contexts, reflecting variances in livelihood pathways and outcomes (Harrison, 2019; Mamelani Projects, 2020). Research across the world has shown that this period in a young adult's life constitutes not only a major transition, but a process that is at least as complex and stressful as that of separation. It can place immense pressure on young people who are already vulnerable and at high risk (Dickens, 2018; Moodley, Raninga & Sewpaul, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Although youths face different hurdles in their transition to adulthood, those in child and youth care centres (CYCCs) experience significant challenges resulting from their past experiences of harm, neglect, abuse and separation from parents (Dickens, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018), or the precipitating reasons for their referrals to CYCCs. After leaving care, they are at increased risk of low educational attainment, unemployment, early pregnancy, substance abuse, crime, imprisonment and homelessness (Fredericks, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Mamelani Projects, 2020; Obeng, 2020; Sekibo, 2020; Van Breda, 2018).

As a result, the adequate preparation of youths and the strengthening of their social networks are of paramount importance before they return to family members or are reintegrated into the community to live independently. Social support networks in the context of this study refer to formal or informal arrangements and processes by a group of individuals with common interests or activities that share and exchange information and provide and receive support (Rosenberg, 2019). Social support networks are often incorporated into after-care support programmes to ensure improved outcomes for youths' post-residential care (Nurcombe-Thorne, Nadesan & Van Breda, 2018). Bond and Van Breda (2018) suggest that a planned and properly managed preparation process for leaving care is necessary, thus incorporating a network of social support for youths ageing out of care. However, in the South African context there are no uniform guidelines on how this transition is to be implemented (Dickens, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018).

Disadvantaged youths, which include but are not limited to youths living in poverty, refugees, orphans, the marginalised and youths in CYCCs, face additional adversities during their transition to adulthood (Bond, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Harder, Mann-Feder, Oterholm & Refaeli, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Sekibo, 2020). Studies on marginalised youths show that they experience poverty, trauma and discrimination, which can often lead to risky behaviours and negative transition outcomes (Gwenzi, 2020; Obeng, 2020; Takele & Kotecho, 2020). The transition from a CYCC to community life is often a difficult adjustment for these young people. They are forced to become 'instant adults', and in many cases struggle to cope with life's challenges outside of the CYCC (Dickens, 2018; Van Breda, 2018). They lose most of the economic, social and emotional support previously provided to them by the CYCC and must deal with major changes in their lives at a far younger age than most people, having to find employment and often new homes on their own (Campos, Goig & Ceunca, 2020; Mendes & McCurdy, 2019; Trif, 2018).

Even with the extension of support, youths transitioning out of residential care experience difficulties in completing and attaining higher education and training, finding and maintaining employment, securing stable housing, and building and maintaining healthy relationships (Bond, 2020; Campos *et al.*, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Sekibo, 2020). Studies (Mhongera & Lombard, 2018; Takele & Kotecho, 2020; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020) have shown that many young people, unable to meet their basic needs

once they age out of care, end up living in poverty, committing a crime, taking substances and experiencing early parenthood. Moreover, the low-income status among youths aging out of care was found to exacerbate challenges in the areas of housing and employment, resulting in a higher risk for poor mental health (specifically relating to substance abuse) and physical health (Dutta, 2018; Dickens, 2018; Frimpong-Manso, 2020). Therefore, they often find themselves becoming entangled with the criminal justice system (Sekibo, 2020).

Globally, services, programmes and policies have been created in an attempt to support the transition from CYCCs into independent living. According to most of the studies reviewed, these interventions do not fully equip and prepare young people for independent living (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Mogale, 2019; Van Breda, 2018). Section 191(3)(e) of the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2005) requires CYCCs to offer transitional support to youths exiting care. Although it refers to preparation and support for transition from care, the Children's Act does not indicate which specific services would provide the kind of support required by youths exiting CYCCs (Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Pinkerton & Van Breda, 2019; Van Breda, 2018). The topic of preparing youths to exit CYCCs and the provision of after-care services is fairly new and under-researched in South Africa and, as a result, services are largely underdeveloped (Van Breda, 2018).

According to Hlungwani and Van Breda (2020), child and youth care workers (CYCWs) in South Africa are not trained to facilitate programmes that meet the specific needs of youths transitioning out of residential care. There is a dearth of formal research on how best to support youths as they make this transition to life outside of residential care (Mamelani Projects, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Some studies focus on youth experiences and the challenges they face once they exit residential care (Dickens, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). However, little is known about the development and use of social networks as youths aging out of residential state care move into adult roles in areas such as housing, employment and education. As a result, many CYCCs have found it difficult to fully prepare young people for independent living and to offer continued support so that they might cope with typical adult challenges (Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, in the CYCC environment there is very little focus on building strong social support networks for the youth (Fredericks, 2018). This means that many youths leave CYCCs without the necessary skills, resources and social networks needed in order to thrive outside residential care.

A scoping review was chosen to examine the extent, range and nature of research on social networks for youths aging out of residential state care and to identify knowledge gaps on the topic. Currently there appear to be a limited number of studies on this aspect of youth protection services and little is known on the topic. The objective of this scoping review was to examine the available evidence on the social networks and transitional services provided by CYCCs to youths aging out of residential care and to identify any guidelines on this topic.

METHODOLOGY

The scoping review was guided by the methodological framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). A scoping review is a summary of what is known about a specific topic, addressing the topic from multiple perspectives, based on a range of studies and study designs (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac, Colquhoun & O'Brien, 2010). Scoping reviews are different from systematic reviews. While systematic reviews aim to answer a particular research question through a critical appraisal of studies with specific methodological characteristics, scoping reviews include qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as samples of non-research materials; the quality of the studies selected is not evaluated, as in the case of systematic reviews. A scoping review is conducted to examine the extent, range and nature of research articles on a particular topic, hence allowing researchers to summarise and disseminate research findings and to identify gaps in the existing literature with regard to the topic examined. In this study a methodology for the scoping review was selected that would enable the identification of all literature on the topic of social support networks available to youths aging out of residential care into independent living that promoted positive outcomes, regardless of the design, perceived strength and quality of the selected studies. The aim of the scoping review was to

examine the literature on social support networks available to youths aging out of residential care into independent living that promoted positive outcomes. In terms of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, the following five stages were followed in conducting this scoping review.

Stage 1: Identify the research question

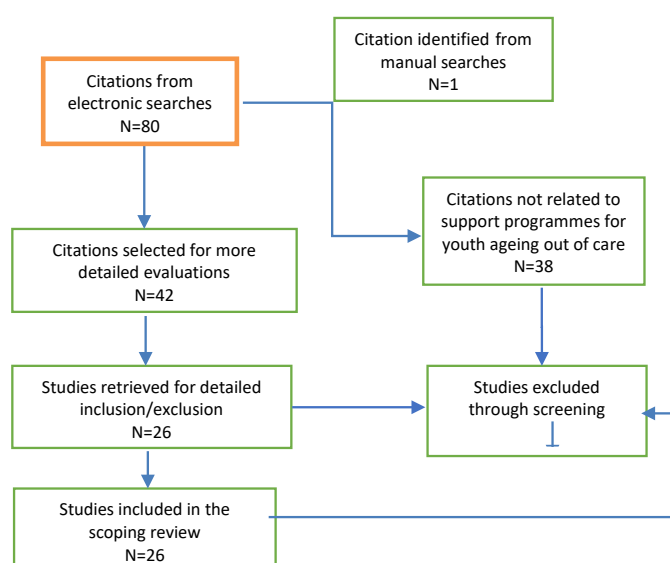
The primary research question that guided this review was: *What are the existing social support networks available to youths aging out of residential care into independent living that promote positive transition outcomes?* The following supporting questions were developed during the review process to address specific areas of the primary research question:

- What types of transition interventions (services, programmes, policies) are used to support youths aging out of CYCCs?
- What support networks are available to these youths?
- What are the characteristics of these support networks?
- What specific forms of help do youths get from their support networks that enable them to cope with independent living?

Stage 2: Identify relevant studies

Searches of 11 databases were conducted in August 2020: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, Sabinet African Journals, Cambridge Core, Science Direct, Sage publications, Elsevier, Taylor and Francis online journals, Oxford journals and Springer. A total of 80 articles were found, of which only 26 met the inclusion criteria. The checklist Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) was used as it helps researchers to develop an understanding of essential reporting items, relevant terminology and core concepts for use in scoping reviews (Peters, Godfrey, McInerney, Munn, Tricco & Khalil, 2020). PRISMA-ScR was applied by (1) identifying titles deemed suitable, based on the keywords, (2) screening abstracts, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (3) selecting studies that met the proposed study criteria. Figure 1 below illustrates the process that was followed when selecting studies for review. Keywords included social support networks, youth, aging out of care, residential care and positive transition outcomes.

FIGURE 1
FLOW CHART OF THE PROCESS OF SELECTING STUDIES FOR REVIEW



Source: Adapted from Liu, Irwin & Morrow (2015)

Stage 3: Study selection

The researchers set the following inclusion criteria: English, full-text, peer-reviewed, open-access studies conducted between 2015 and 2020 on social networks and transitional services provided by CYCCs to youths aging out of residential care. The date parameters of 2015 and 2020 ensured that only more recent and therefore relevant studies were considered. The exclusion criteria were: peer-reviewed studies on the topic in any language other than English, paid content and older than 2015. A data extraction sheet, as proposed by Peters *et al.* (2020), was used (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
DATA EXTRACTION TOOL

Author/Year/Country	Aims/Purpose	Population/ Sample Size	Methodology/Methods	Key Findings relating to social support networks
Bond, S. (2020). Eastern Cape, South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818801106	To establish what preparation and follow-up services are available to youth transitioning into independent living, and the evaluation of these services by the care-leavers.	Four Child & Youth Care Centres. Sample: 12 youths, social care workers and CYCW.	Qualitative focus groups	Most (eight) participants felt that preparation was good in terms of domestic skills; ten (10) felt that they could return to CYCC for assistance. An important finding was that care-leavers were lonely and that no after-care services existed in the most vulnerable months after care-leavers had left care. The study noted the importance of social support as a critical factor affecting outcomes for care-leavers.
Harder, Mann-Feder, Oterholm & Refaeli, (2020). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105260	To uncover the principles that support social work practice for care-leavers, based on a project run by a group of international researchers on care-leaving.		Qualitative	The findings revealed the importance of listening to the young people, the critical nature of supporting their autonomy both during and after leaving care, the importance for the young people of a sense of cultural identity and openness to diversity, and the importance of access to education after care. Support in all these areas would ensure a more positive leaving outcome.
Sekibo, B. (2020). Nigeria. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818822232	To examine aftercare experiences of young people who had recently left residential care.	20 care-leavers	Qualitative interviews	Challenges faced by care-leavers were unemployment, financial problems, living and surviving alone, finding accommodation and social integration. These problems were experienced as a result of inadequate preparation, being orphans and the care backgrounds they had experienced. What helped was personal resilience and support from formal and informal social support networks. Those who asked for help from their former caregivers were more likely to find menial jobs and access to services, and were better able to get on as a result.
Frimpong-Manso, K. (2020). Ghana. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818807114	To explore factors that promote successful transition to emerging adulthood for care-leavers.	7 care-leavers	Qualitative interviews	Most (six) attributed their successful transition to the positive relationships they had formed in the children's village and (five) to their having received adequate skills training for their transition to adulthood. Personal resilience and excellent informal support, even in the absence of any formal support, emerged as strong predictors of ability to survive well. Overall finding: Care-leavers who have social support, adequate preparation for adulthood, and positive relationships can overcome their challenges and transition successfully.
Takele, A.M. & Kotecho, M.G. (2020). Ethiopia. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696819868355	To examine female care-leavers' experiences of aftercare	Population: 27 young female care-leavers of Kechene Sample: 3	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Participants reported negative transition outcomes, mainly as result of a lack of after-care support, which had significant consequences for them. Establishing ties with family members was found to be a potential source of support for care-leavers.

Author/Year/Country	Aims/Purpose	Population/ Sample Size	Methodology/Methods	Key Findings relating to social support networks
Gwenzi, G.D. (2020). Zimbabwe. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818800846	To examine how care-leavers define family. To examine who counts as family for care-leavers	Nine residential care facilities Sample: 30 care-leavers	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	Biological ties were found to persist, despite negative experiences; however, non-biological relationships provided the emotional support these participants needed and valued. What was interesting was that tracing their family of origin became the major task of care-leavers on leaving care. The search left them vulnerable to identity crises, whether or not they found their biological families. Loss of their social networks during early adulthood was identified as a threat to their wellbeing.
Bukuluki, P.M., Kamyra, S., Kasirye, R. & Nabulya, A. (2020). Uganda. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696819833592	To explore agency enablers and factors that hinder adolescents and emerging adults in their transition from care to adulthood. Emphasis on the transition to work.	Five hundred adolescents and young adults Sample: 256	Cross-sectional (case studies, questionnaire, focus groups and in-depth interviews)	Care programmes helped care-leavers to gain needed skills that facilitated self-reliance through employment in the formal sector. Enablers identified were mentors, exchange-programme learning visits, placements within a business and positive social support networks.
Dickens, L. & Marx, P. (2020). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818805891	Compare care-leavers who were 'not in employment, education or training (NEET)' with those who were 'engaged in employment, education and training (EET)'. Participants were drawn from Girls and Boys Town (GBT) and questioned at 1 and 2 years after leaving care.	Ten GBT residential facilities Sample: 82	Cross-sectional	While the data from this study highlighted the vulnerability of youths 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) after care in most outcome areas, it also confirmed that all youths in transition from care are vulnerable and are still very dependent on others. Family support networks were found to be crucial for positive outcomes for all youths.
Dickens, L. (2018). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12411	To examine the one-year outcomes of youths transitioning out of a residential care facility in South Africa.	Care-leavers Sample: 52	Quantitative	Participants were especially vulnerable in the area of educational attainments and employment, and ran the risk of being 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET). This was found to have economic and psychological consequences for youths, many of whom relied on social support networks for their livelihoods, and suffered from depression, isolation and a sense of hopelessness. Education and job-acquisition skills were found to be essential for preparing youths for transitioning into independent living.
Van Breda, A.D. (2018). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2018.20	To review care-leaving research work from 2003 to 2016. To provide an overview of what has been learned about care-leaving and care-leavers in South Africa.	Forty research outputs on care-leaving in South Africa.	Systematic literature review	Many researchers used resilience theory as the underpinning theory of their studies. Youths reported being inadequately prepared for independent living, lacking both support and the life skills necessary for stable adulthood. Enabling factors for youths included relationships with caring adults outside the care system, such as teachers, family members and lovers, personal spirituality and optimism. Informal and formal social support networks were found to be essential for enhancing positive transition outcomes for youths.
Fredericks, C. (2018). Cape Town, South Africa. https://hdl.handle.net/11427/31295	To explore the experiences of Cape Town youths transitioning to independent living from CYCCs.	Youths living in CYCCs in Cape Town Sample: 20	Qualitative	Some youths perceived their exit from residential care as an unpleasant event in their lives, while others viewed it as an opportunity to take on more responsibility. Youths aspired to contact their families of origin, enrol in tertiary institutions, find employment and help others in need. They seemed fully aware of the challenges awaiting them. Recommendations included improving existing transition programmes, pairing youths living in CYCCs with mentors during their transition period, and improving the government's role in supporting CYCCs.

Author/Year/Country	Aims/Purpose	Population/ Sample Size	Methodology/Methods	Key Findings relating to social support networks
Moodley, Ranninga & Sewpaul, (2020). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818812603	To understand the perceptions and experiences of youths transitioning out of CYCCs.	Youths about to leave care and those who had already transitioned out of CYCCs. Sample: 16	Qualitative (in-depth interviews)	Three main findings were: the positive influence of sociocultural networks; the importance of re-connecting with family; and the multiple risk factors that prevail in families of origin that continue to compromise positive outcomes for youths transitioning out of care. The key recommendation was for stronger connections for youths and more resourceful social networks.
Hlungwani, J. & Van Breda, A.D. (2020). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12776	To describes the psychosocial resilience factors that facilitate the successful transition of young women out of residential care into young adulthood.	CYCC care-leavers in Gauteng province. Sample: 9 females	Qualitative (interviews)	Although some resilience factors are shared by both male and female care-leavers, some were found to be specific to women, notably motherhood and the managing of responsibilities. The conclusion was that resilience-building programmes for young people leaving care should be cognisant of male and female needs, and address issues specific to the transition of women.
Van Breda, A.D. & Pinkerton, J. (2020). South Africa. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696819870356	To present the findings of scholars from the global North and global South on care-leaving and emerging adulthood, and to consider the implications of a rising 'African voice' in global dialogue.	Scholars from the global North and South	Collection of essays	Key findings were: The 'family' takes centre stage in research on care-leaving, because children normally come into care as a result of problems in 'family' care; transition outcomes are complicated by dislocation from the clan (since finding work, getting married and having children are issues tied to the clan); in the global North children enter residential care due to abuse and neglect in the family, but in Africa they enter the care system because of failures at the macro level, such as economic difficulties.
Mhongera, P.B. & Lombard, A. (2018). Zimbabwe. https://dx.doi.org/10.15270/54-1-614	To understand how institutions (government-based and NGO-based) deliver transition services to adolescents for life outside care and whether these services comply with Standard Six of Zimbabwe National Residential Child Care Standards.	Young persons living in and exited from government and NGO institutions. Sample: 16 adolescent girls living in institutions, and 16 young adults who have transitioned out of care.	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus groups)	Five key findings included: there was no facilitation of access to employment; there were no services to provide secure accommodation or transitional houses for care-leavers; care-leavers with special needs received no special support or follow-up, because of lack of resources; family members lacked capacity to provide social support; and youths struggled to establish permanent relationships after care. The study concluded that these issues could be overcome by the development of a programme-based transition model and case management system.
Sulimani-Aidan, Y. (2020). Israel. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104967	To look at the challenges and barriers experienced during the transitional stage of 23-year-old Arab Israelis from their own perspectives.	Graduates of Arab residential facilities in Israel. Sample: 23	Qualitative (interviews)	The study found that cultural and social expectations imposed social restrictions on youths. Female participants felt that because of gender perceptions they could not study or work and were instead encouraged to marry. Males felt that they were obligated to take care of their families and support them economically. Lack of positive social ties was common. Relationships with parents were viewed as unsupportive and, in many cases, harmful. Some females reported having experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse by close family relatives such as fathers and brothers. Many of the youths described feelings of loneliness and isolation from their own community and from society in general, and struggled to make new friends and trusting relationships in both their formal and informal social networks. Due to limited resources, these youths were often forced to return home after leaving residential care, often a traumatic experience for them.
Melkman, E. P., & Benbenishty, R. (2018). Israel.	To examine the association between childhood adversity and adult functioning among youths	Youth care-leavers Sample: 345	Qualitative interviews	The relationship between childhood adversity and youths leaving care was fully or partially mediated

Author/Year/Country	Aims/Purpose	Population/ Sample Size	Methodology/Methods	Key Findings relating to social support networks
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.01.040	aging out of care, and to explore how social support networks mediated this association.			by social support across the various types of support and outcomes examined. Network size and network adequacy were the most prominent predictors of functioning.
Manuel, J. I., Munson, M. R., Dino, M., Villodas, M. L., Barba, A. & Panzer,. (2018). United States. Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1037/Prj0000332	To improve understanding on how best to assist disadvantaged youth during their transition to adulthood; what services would best help them achieve independence within existing public systems of care.	17 direct service providers and supervisors	Qualitative (interviews)	Findings had important implications for practice, such as the need to adapt clinical practices to meet the unique needs of transition-age youths and young adults; the importance of engaging with and expanding positive support systems; and the need to shift the mindset of transition-age youths and young adults, their caregivers and providers from a perspective of 'aging out' of the mental health system to a perspective of 'continuing on' in the management of their mental health through treatment and rehabilitation, as needed.
Dickens, L. (2018). South Africa. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12411	To improve the understanding of care leaving in South Africa and Africa, and to expand knowledge based on research internationally.	52 care-leavers	Qualitative surveys	Findings from this study showed that youths struggle to obtain education or training and secure a permanent job. Lack of skills made them vulnerable, forcing them to depend on others for their livelihoods and increasing feelings of depression, isolation and dependency.
Trif, G. (2018). Britain. https://kar.kent.ac.uk/66432/	To understand the strategies used to negotiate independent living through the lenses of social capital and social networks. To improve care-leaving policies and practice.	58 participants (31 care leavers from Romania and 17 from England, together with five professionals from each country).	Qualitative (interviews and vignettes)	Findings showed a close relationship between social networks or social capital and participants' outcomes in areas such as personal resilience, positive identity formation and socio-economic status. The findings show the importance of a strong foundation of support prior to leaving care. However, the study maintained that an understanding of social capital is in its infancy in this area, and that more empirical evidence was necessary to deepen an understanding of the phenomenon's mitigating role in securing youth wellbeing and positive outcomes.
Verstraete, J., Pannecoucke, I., Meeus, B. & De Decker, P. (2018). Belgium. https://10.1080/01488376.2018.1479330	To reconstruct the pathways of institution leavers to the housing market, the support they receive and the difficulties they experience.	Focus group (street-level bureaucrats who work in youth care and psychiatric institutions)	Qualitative (in-depth interviews)	Despite the existence of many programmes that prepare care-leavers for the transition to independent living and legal developments that strengthen their position in society and the housing market, care-leavers faced at least three hindrances to acquiring stable housing in Flanders: a lack of affordable housing; a lack of access to (non-residential) social assistance; and personal difficulties in coping with living independently.
Dutta, S. (2018). India. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs92201818217	To assess the preparation for social reintegration of young Indian girls about to leave their residential care homes.	100 girls in institutions	Qualitative (interviews)	The girls interviewed felt adequately equipped with basic life skills and access to housing after leaving care. However, they were not hopeful about their psychological wellbeing and ability to access higher education, social support, employment and financial independence.
Campos, G., Goig, R. & Ceunca, E. (2020). Madrid, Spain. http://ojs.ual.es/ojs/index.php/EJREP/article/view/2599/3446	To examine young persons' support networks for social inclusion and the importance they give to these networks.	Care-leavers and emerging young adults Sample: 64	Quantitative	Most support came from educators and friends, and to a lesser extent from family, whose support was mainly material. New networks appeared as a result of marriage and motherhood. However, cases of social isolation were reported. Less than a quarter of the care-leavers lived independently, with the rest needing support from family, friends and mentors (social networks). However, very few opted to live with their families, preferring to live on their own.
Mendes, P. & McCurdy, S. (2019). Australia. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017319852702	To critically examine the findings of six Australian child-protection and out-of-home support programmes.	Six recent Australian child-protection inquiries, five at state and territory level and one at Commonwealth level.	Content analysis	All six inquiries identified major limitations in the legislation, policy and practice of leaving residential care, and reported poor outcomes in key areas such as housing, education and employment. There was consensus that post-18 assistance should be expanded, and most stated that greater attention should be paid to the specific

Author/Year/Country	Aims/Purpose	Population/ Sample Size	Methodology/Methods	Key Findings relating to social support networks
				cultural needs of a large number of indigenous care-leavers.
Attar-Schwartz, S. & Huri, Y. (2019). Israel. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.11.033	To examine the contribution of informal grandparent support to the life satisfaction of adolescents in residential care.	Adolescents in Grades 8 to 12 residing in educational residential care settings Sample: 1 236	Quantitative (Questionnaires)	Participants identified maternal grandparents as their closest grandparents. Those who enjoyed close relationships with grandparents reported higher and strong levels of life satisfaction. A significant correlation was found between grandparent support, parent-grandparent relationships and adolescent life satisfaction. The conclusion confirmed the importance of social support networks for youths in residential care, emphasising that such support improves a positive transition to adulthood and independent living.
Obeng, J.K. (2020). Portugal. https://hdl.handle.net/10071/20677	To explore how adolescent mothers living in care in Portugal experienced support in their life transitions.	Adolescent mothers in residential care Sample: 5	Qualitative (Skype video interviews)	Adolescent mothers were placed into care where they experienced institutional support, sexual trauma support, some relationship with family members, and social support from friends and partners. They were able to develop resilience through a combination of their own determination and the presence of such support. They had high future life expectations, such as acquiring a good education, employment and accommodation, and high hopes for their children.

Of the 26 studies that met the inclusion criteria, 18 were qualitative, three were quantitative and two were cross-sectional. Most studies were conducted in South Africa (10), six (6) in other African countries (Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Uganda), four (4) in Europe, four (4) in Asia, one in Australia, and one in North America. Studies from Europe, America and Asia were included for comparison purposes with African studies, with particular attention devoted to South African studies.

Stage 4: Charting the data

This stage involved recording important information identified in the data generated by the literature search. During this stage, the three reviewers engaged in a process of developing the data charting form (See Table 1). The following variables were included: author(s) and year in which the study was published, the country where the study was conducted, aims, purpose or objectives of the study, research population and sample size, research methodology and data instruments used, and key findings.

Nine themes emerged during the process of data extraction. These are:

- Support for educational attainment;
- Financial support and job access;
- Support for quality living;
- Initiating and maintaining relationships;
- Reconnecting with and maintaining family relationships;
- Community support and mentorship;
- Life-skills preparation;
- Opportunities for personal growth and the development of resilience;
- Social support networks.

Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting the findings

The three reviewers conducted an independent analysis of the data following the eight steps proposed by Tesch, in Creswell (2014), for thematic analysis in qualitative studies. They then conducted a consensus consultation and reached agreement on the final themes for inclusion. Agreement was reached on the interpretation of findings and their implications for policy, practice and future research.

FINDINGS

Various transitional services, programmes and policies were noted in this review, all acting as interventions to prepare youths for life after they have exited residential care. Although the majority of the CYCCs mentioned in the studies are regulated and funded by government, they implement transition policies and support interventions differently. The following sections describe the transition interventions and youth support networks available to transitioning youths, and how they affect transition outcomes. Based on the findings, recommendations are given for supporting youths transitioning out of CYCCs.

Support for educational attainment

Many studies (nine) in this review, all in South Africa, found that attaining higher education constituted a special challenge to youths who have aged out of the CYCC system (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2020; Van Breda, 2018; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). Most youths in CYCCs lacked family and financial support, and as a result found entry into tertiary education more difficult than their peers in the general population do (Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). They had fewer prospects than their peers to progress from high school and seldom obtained higher education qualifications (Bond, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020). Six of the studies found that most youths in CYCCs had a higher chance of failing matric than their classmates did who had family-based backgrounds and support from their social networks (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, many young people across South Africa lacked vocational and educational support (Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). As a result, many cannot find secure work or an attractive job in line with their vocational training, largely as a result of the absence of a social network and the CYCCs' failure to coordinate job placement, especially in the case of female care-leavers (Mogale, 2019; Van Breda, 2018). The findings from nine studies conducted in South Africa were similar to those of other African countries such as Zimbabwe (two) (Gwendie, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2018), Uganda (one) (Bukuluki, Kanya, Kasirye & Nabulya (2020) and West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia) (three) (Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Sekibo, 2020; Takele & Kotecho, 2020) as well as abroad (Dutta, 2018; Trif, 2018; Verstraete *et al.*, 2018), in that they found youths in residential care lacked support to achieve higher educational outcomes. On the whole, youths in residential care in developed countries had better educational options than those in emerging countries; developed countries offer campus support programmes that provide social, personal and informational support to promote resilience and to prepare youths for the transition from high school to tertiary education (Campos *et al.*, 2020; Mendes & McCurdy, 2019; Trif, 2018). Recommendations included building a strong social support network and the formulation of a more comprehensive after-care educational policy for youths transitioning out of residential care.

Nine of the studies reviewed recommended that care-leavers continue to make use of after-care support from both formal and informal social networks (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). The youths viewed after-care support as supportive and helpful in their attempt to navigate the adult world on their own.

Financial support and job access

Many studies (eight) in South Africa showed that youths transitioning from residential care to independent living struggle to find employment, a finding supported by studies in other countries (Bond, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Gwenzi, 2020; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Manuel *et al.*, 2018; Obeng, 2020; Trif, 2018; Van Breda, 2018). Five studies showed that many youths transitioning out of CYCCs did not have permanent jobs and earned incomes below the poverty line (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Moreover, they progressed more slowly in the labour market than youths who had support before and after leaving care (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Harder *et al.*,

2020). Recommendations included vocational training and youth mentoring programmes for all youths transitioning from CYCCs.

Support for quality living

Eight South African studies found, like the international and other African studies, that youths who received housing interventions and support from their social networks (mentors, family, social workers) experienced less homelessness than those who did not enjoy such support (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). Three studies (Fredericks, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020) found that youths who lacked support networks from their microsystems were more vulnerable to homelessness than those who received help from their social networks. Recommendations included alternative housing arrangements and social support for youths aging out of care, since without such support there is a high probability that such youths would return to high-risk environments (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020). Another recommendation was for CYCCs to be more proactive when linking youths with their families and support networks in order to provide the additional support required for a successful transition to independence (Fredericks, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020).

Initiating and maintaining relationships

The studies revealed that, for various reasons, relationships for youths in residential care were not always sustained over the long term. From the time that youths were removed from their biological homes, many reported losing contact and relations with their former microsystems (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Fredericks, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). The longer a young person remained in residential care, the more loss of former relationships they experienced, which negatively affected transition outcomes (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Harder *et al.*, 2020). However, in three studies, youths indicated that the CYCC was a platform that helped them to build meaningful and healthy formal relationships with their child and youth care workers, social workers and mentors, and informal relationships with their friends and churches (Bond, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). A high value was placed on friends, significant others and positive parent figures by most young people interviewed. The findings of four studies revealed the importance of at least one long-term relationship with an individual as youths transitioned into adulthood (Campos *et al.*, 2020; Dutta, 2018; Obeng, 2020; Trif, 2018). Recommendations from various studies included pairing youths in CYCCs with mentors, strengthening family and social support networks, and involving such networks in preparing youths for exiting residential care (Fredericks, 2018; Gwenzi, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Takele & Kotecho, 2020; Trif, 2018).

Reconnecting with and maintaining family relationships

Close ties with family assist youths by sustaining them through the process of transitioning (Campos *et al.*, 2020; Gwenzi, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). In general, family connections are an important source of support during the time of transition; however, Van Breda and Pinkerton (2020) point out that there are different interpretations of the term 'family'. In the global North, 'family' is understood to mean the nuclear family (parents and children), while extended family refers to grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles (Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). On the other hand, in African cultures 'family' was understood to be the clan or kin, which includes everyone belonging to one's ancestral line and those married into that line (Fredericks, 2018). In this scoping review, four studies conducted in Africa found that youth transition outcomes were complicated by disintegrated families, lack of maternal love and broken relationships in families (Fredericks, 2018; Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2018; Takele & Kotecho, 2020).

In the Zimbabwean study by Gwenzi (2020), youths indicated that biological relationships generally continued despite negative experiences. Participants felt that emotional support and relationships were based on the provision of love and care (Gwenzi, 2020). The study further found that youths described 'family' as individuals in their lives who behaved and lived like family, and provided care, as expected

within a family setup (Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2020). Tracing their family of origin became a major task for care-leavers, which in many cases left them vulnerable to identity crises and a sense of having almost no social network during emerging adulthood (Gwenzi, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). Most studies recommended that CYCCs should do more to strengthen and preserve the family relationships of youths in residential care.

Community support and mentorship

A study by Van Breda (2018) in South Africa found that youths who had participated in Mamelani Projects' (2020) independent living programme (ILP) were more likely to complete high school, obtain employment and become self-sufficient when leaving their CYCC. Mamelani Projects (2020) is a non-government organisation that offers the ILP to youths between the ages of 16 and 21 in residential care facilities in Cape Town. Their services aim to develop youths' self-sufficiency and to reduce difficulties during the transition to independence (Fredericks, 2018; Van Breda, 2018). The ILP includes preparation for employment in the form of life-skills training to enhance the youths' ability to manage daily living (Van Breda, 2018). ILP youths worked closely with a social worker or mentor to address their goals and to develop an independent living plan based on their particular needs. This study recommended that the government foster care grant be extended to cover young people over the age of 18, and that a separate grant be made available to youths over the age of 18 who are in the process of transitioning out of CYCCs (Van Breda, 2018).

Another example of a community programme that included mentorship is South African Youth Education for Sustainability (SAYes) 2019 (MacDonald, Fargas-Malet, Marco, Pinkerton, Mathews, Kelly & Montgomery, 2020). This organisation provides socio-emotional support to youths aging out of care through relationships created between youths and their mentors (MacDonald *et al.*, 2020; SAYes, 2019). Findings revealed that youths who were in the SAYes programme and had long relationships with their mentors enjoyed more positive outcomes when transitioning to independent living than those who had only short relationships (SAYes, 2019; Van Breda, 2018). Other studies (Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018) also identified that youths who had a mentor (who served as a role model) were more likely to experience success in transitioning than those who had no mentor. Specifically, positive educational outcomes were reported among youths who had mentors (Dickens, 2018; Van Breda, 2018). Findings show that mentorship programmes allowed youths to exercise their relationship-building skills, which left them feeling positive, empowered and better equipped to regulate their emotions (Fredericks, 2018). Recommendations for practice from these articles included tailored interventions to enhance existing relationships and the facilitation of lasting mentoring relationships for youths aging out of residential care (Dickens, 2018; Fredericks, 2018; Van Breda, 2018).

Life-skills preparation

Life-skills preparation is an essential form of support for youths transitioning out of state care. In this review, four studies showed that life-skills education provided enhanced opportunities for youths in residential care to transition well into independent living (Dickens & Marx, 2020; Harder *et al.*, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). Other findings also pointed to the importance of life-skills preparation, which would include training in broad areas such as self-care, career development and daily living tasks (Bond, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Manuel *et al.*, 2018; Obeng, 2020). Recommendations from youths who had participated in these studies were that there needs to be a balance between psychosocial interventions and life-skill programmes by social services organisations and social workers, geared toward easing their transition to independent living.

Providing opportunities for personal growth and resilience

Seven of the reviewed studies found that youths were not fully prepared and equipped for the transition to independent living. As a result, the youths faced many challenges, such as lack of permanent employment, homelessness, early parenthood and lack of income to meet their basic needs (Bond, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Fredericks, 2018; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Sekibo, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Factors that enhanced the ability to cope were personal resilience, spirituality,

optimism and meaningful relationships with teachers, families or lovers (Van Breda, 2018). Two studies reported that youths were able to develop resilience through a combination of their own determination and social support. Many had high hopes for their education, employment and accommodation, and believed that they had a good future (Bond, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020). Recommendations included CYCCs providing youths with opportunities for personal growth, a focused attempt to strengthen youths' social support networks, and the fostering of a spiritual life among the youth.

Social support networks

Findings from this scoping review show that social networks, whether formal or informal, positively affect transition outcomes (Bond, 2020; Bukuluki *et al.*, 2020; Dickens & Marx, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Sekibo, 2020; Sulimani-Aidan, 2020; Trif, 2018; Van Breda, 2018). Social networks were found to be significant and beneficial for promoting successful transition outcomes amongst youths in all the studies reviewed. Many studies recommended that CYCCs' transition programmes should include after-care support services for youths exiting residential care, and a deliberate attempt to strengthen both formal and informal social networks.

Three studies referred to youths receiving formal support from CYCC staff in the form of referrals to housing, along with educational and financial assistance (Bond, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). In South Africa, these formal support networks involved youths' relationships with their social workers, CYCWs, CYCC managers and partners (Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020). Qualities of strong ties included stability, multidimensional support, advocacy, honesty and genuineness, areas of commonality, trust and small interconnected core networks (Moodley *et al.*, 2020). Youths in these three studies knew they could go back to their CYCCs for assistance, which helped extend the care these youths received while transitioning to independent living (Bond, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020). A recommendation was that service providers learn the qualities that youths value in close relationships, so that they can better support relational permanency from multiple sources for youths aging out of residential care (Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020).

Many of the youths interviewed in these studies received support from the informal relationships they had formed with people in the CYCCs (Bond, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Support took the form of money, visits, calls, babysitting and emotional support (Gwenzi, 2020; Hlungwani & Van Breda, 2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Takele & Kotecho, 2020; Trif, 2018; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). Participants typically trusted network members who were reliable and with whom they had regular contact (Bukuluki *et al.*, 2020; Gwenzi, 2020; Mhongera & Lombard, 2018; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Takele & Kotecho, 2020). Recommendations were that CYCCs and support organisations strive to establish a strong foundation of support for youths, and that informal support networks be involved in transition preparation programmes.

DISCUSSION

This is the first scoping review to examine and map the available evidence on the social support interventions and social networks available to youths who are aging out of residential care, and as such represents a necessary first step for identifying gaps and developing guidelines for CYCCs. The findings of this scoping review also shed light on areas for future research.

The majority (23) of the reviewed studies evaluated the independent living interventions in CYCCs and examined care-leavers' experiences, while three examined policies and key lessons learned. The interventions mentioned in the studies all aimed to improve the outcomes for youths transitioning out of residential care to independent living, and to assist them in attaining housing, employment and successful educational outcomes. The studies reported positive outcomes in these areas among youths who went through a transition preparation programme and who had both pre- and post-care social support networks. Independent living interventions, in particular, were generally offered by the CYCCs, all of which were funded by the government (as opposed to being private residential care facilities). However, many studies evaluated the transition support offered to youths aging out of care as insufficient, and lacking proper guidelines and uniformity; in addition, some were implemented by untrained staff of CYCWs (Bond,

2020; Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda, 2018). Many CYCCs attempt to provide support to youths but are not able to offer after-care support because of a lack of resources (Bond, 2020). Many do not have after-care policies, programmes and services for youths aging out of residential care, which leaves youths vulnerable to negative transition outcomes, such as homelessness, early parenthood, substance abuse and unemployment.

A few studies evaluated the effect of social support networks (both formal and informal) on the transition period for youths exiting care. Mentorship within social support networks resulted in more successful transitions to adulthood, as evidenced by higher rates of educational attainment, employment, standards of housing and quality of life among youths who had been paired with mentors (Fredericks, 2018, Moodley *et al.*, 2020; Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). Employment outcomes for youths transitioning out of CYCCs are generally poor, exacerbating the social challenges faced by youths who transitioned into independent living from CYCCs (Bond, 2020; Van Breda, 2018, Van Breda & Pinkerton, 2020). Studies in this scoping review support the view that youths who age out of CYCCs have less stable employment and lower earnings than youths in the general population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for practice

Social service professionals working in CYCCs and facilitating transition programmes should be sufficiently trained before they can render the service. Furthermore, transition support interventions need to focus on constructing positive identity, strengthening relationships in young people's microsystems and building resilience in youths aging out of CYCCs. Guidelines should be developed for CYCCs implementing transition support programmes. These guidelines should include a strong component of both pre-leaving preparation and post-leaving support. Part of the post-leaving support should take the form of mentorship relationships, so that care-leavers have at least one strong and caring adult in their social network. A range of after-care support services should continue for at least two years after young people have exited the CYCC.

Recommendations for future research

Longitudinal studies are needed to establish long-term outcomes of social support networks and to determine their impact on youth transition outcomes. Further research should be done to compare outcomes between youths who are reunited with their families upon leaving the CYCCs and those who transition straight into independent living. Moreover, cost-effectiveness studies are needed, in view of the fact that no studies were found that evaluated the cost-effectiveness of supporting young people's journey to independence compared to withdrawing support at the transition age of 18 years.

Recommendations for policy

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA, 2005) should stipulate what aspects of transition programmes form the minimum acceptable standard for youths aging out of CYCCs. The Department of Social Development (DSD), which governs CYCCs, should provide guidelines to CYCCs on transition services. In addition, DSD should have a policy on after-care support services for youths aging out of residential care, in order to support them with education scholarships and bursaries. Considering the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, the National Youth Development Plan should have a special policy that speaks to assisting youths exiting CYCCs with funds and help to promote entrepreneurship. The government, through the Department of Housing, should offer affordable housing to youths aging out of residential care. However, considering South Africa's housing crisis, this is a considerable challenge.

LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

While extensive, this review may not have captured the entirety of all available data on this topic as the inclusion criteria limited the reviewed studies to English, peer-reviewed, open-access studies conducted between 2015 and 2020 on social networks and transitional services provided by CYCCs to youths aging out of residential care. All studies on foster care were excluded. Another limitation is the lack of

comparison of services and programmes between studies within the same intervention category owing to the uniqueness of each transition support intervention.

CONCLUSION

This scoping review provides a map of the available evidence on interventions available to youths aging out of residential care. The review reinforces the need for further research, in view of the limitations of this review and of existing studies. Generally, all studies revealed that social support networks are essential for youths to ensure after-care support and successful transition outcomes, and yet these are for the most part lacking. Most youths indicated that they sought family and non-family support as they transitioned out of residential care. The findings of this review will be useful for future research on the topic and for CYCCs involved with implementing and evaluating interventions available to youths who are aging out of residential care.

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