

## BUILDING AND UTILISING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING OUT-OF-HOME CARE IN GHANA

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## Background and Rationale

- The extended family cares for majority of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC)
- Growing number of children in child care institutions
- Thus, leaving care for adulthood is becoming common for several young people
- Little is known about the experiences of care leavers in Ghana

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## Objectives of the study

- The objectives of the study are to find out:
  - What are the challenges facing care leavers in Ghana
  - How do Ghanaian care leavers cope with the challenges they face

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## African Literature on Leaving Care & Theory

- Few exploratory research: Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya (Pryce et al.,2015; Ucembe, 2015; Van Breda, 2016)
- Care leavers in Africa face challenges with employment, housing, stigma
- Contributory factor to challenges is limited specialized formal support & informal support (Tanur, 2012)

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## Resilience theory

- Resilience in this study is considered from an ecological perspective (Ungar, 2011)
- According to Ungar resilience is the :
  - Capacity of individuals to navigate to resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways

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## Methods: Study Area



### Ghana

- 26 million population (48% under 18)
- 114 children's homes housing 4432 children
- Leaving care age: 18 years
- SOS children's villages- family based model
- 15 mothers permanently care for 10-12 children in 15 separate family houses
- Youth (over 16 years) move to a youth home within the community until they are 'weaned off' at 23 years

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## Methods

- Qualitative case study
- Semi-structured interviews with 27 young adults who had left care at least a year
- Interviews in English and Pidgin and lasted 45-60 minutes
- Analysis: framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 2003)
- Ethical approval from Queen's Univ. Belfast



## Challenges

- Care leavers in Ghana face challenges because they transition into deprived contexts with no statutory support and limited welfare benefits
  - Unemployment- lack of social connections to link them to scarce jobs (high unemployment rates)
  - Housing challenges (difficulty raising rent advance)
  - Intimate relationships (families unwilling to let their children marry an orphan)



## Findings: Having a secure base

- Several participants a caregiver as a source of emotional and practical support

I would say that my SOS mother had true love for me and she is even showing it till today. There are so many problems she is the one I share with and even when I want to give up she always encourages me to pray and that all will be well. This is true love because though she left SOS her heart is still following me. If you don't care about your child you won't do this" (Tina, early 20s)



## Findings: Having a Secure Base

- Relationships were built on trust and the caregivers and genuine love
- Mothers being more than professionals (family based model) enabled the relationship to develop

"Because she understood what she was doing and she wanted to do it she did it and did it well. **She took as her own.** We were not calling our mother, we were calling her mum" (Joy, 30s)



## Findings: Having a Secure Base

- The caregivers helped participants expand their social networks through holiday visits to relatives, finding mentors (sponsors), amongst others:

"In the Village you were given a list sponsors during and you are encouraged to write to them. I had seven sponsors when I was in the village. Herbert was my best sponsor".



## Findings: Forming positive relationships

- Being able to build a trusting and loving relationship with their caregiver meant the participant left care confident of their abilities to build positive and lasting relationships

"In a way it [relationship with caregivers] gave me an experience because I realised that the way the guy was treating me that wasn't how love should be, this isn't how a relationship should be. I realised it" (Alice, late 20s)



## Findings: Forming positive relationships

- The participants doing well all mentioned a forming a relationship with someone (e.g., friend, partner) who gave them vital support:
 

“So my guy also supported me and I would be completing (education) this year. He takes care of everything. He is my sole source of support” (Dorcas, late 20s)



## Findings: Creating and Utilising Community Resources

- The care leavers also utilized established relationships with other care leavers:
 

“..then among us sometimes you borrow some money and then when you get the money you pay back. That is what I was doing” (Michael, early 30s).



## Findings: Creating and Utilising Community Resources

- Several participants mentioned joining a church and deriving material benefits through the relationships created:
 

“I was in the house for a while and a certain man at church, he is an accountant at IBG, told me that they have opened this sub-company under IBG, it's an IT firm so he told me the company needs some people for contract so if an interested he would help me get the job. So I said okay and he just took my CV and sent it there and I was taken on” (Leo, mid 30s).



## Discussion of Findings

- The study's findings has illuminated the importance of relationships
- Care leavers utilize both weak ties as well as more established relationships to accomplish their goals.
- It enabled care leavers to NAVIGATE to resources within their social context



## Discussion of Findings

- In the context of limited resources, informal support for care leavers may be more realistic and sustainable.
- Leaving care preparation should focus on interdependent living skills (identifying and utilizing community resources)



• THANK YOU FOR YOU TIME

