Challenges Experienced by Youths Leaving Kinship Foster Care in Johannesburg, South Africa

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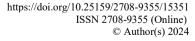University of South Africa
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Abstract

Young people who leave kinship foster care in South Africa typically encounter greater difficulties transitioning to adulthood when compared to their peers who grow up with their biological parents. The aim of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by youths leaving kinship foster care in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The study used a qualitative approach and exploratory, descriptive and contextual research designs. Twenty-three participants were selected by using purposive sampling. The researchers utilised semi-structured interviews as an in-depth data collection tool. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings demonstrated that although youths leaving kinship foster care had access to education, some were unable to finish their secondary education. In addition, the findings showed that poverty and job insecurity were some of the challenges experienced by youths leaving kinship foster care. Furthermore, the findings indicated that youths leaving kinship foster care required social support services such as educational and financial support. Thus, the study recommends developing initiatives to improve school completion rates for youths in kinship foster care; establishing financial support programmes; creating job placement services; offering comprehensive social support; and advocating for policy reforms to help these youths transition to adulthood and independent living.

Keywords: challenges; youth; leaving kinship foster care; foster care

Introduction

In the narrower sense, alternative care comprises all forms of care choices that are temporary in nature, and incorporates foster care, supported independent living, and residential care. Kinship care is unusual because while it is recognised as a means of alternative care, it is largely not temporary in nature (Van der Walt 2018). Van der Walt (2018) defines kinship care as a form of alternative care that is family based, within the child's extended family, or with close friends of the family known to the child (e.g., relatives, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.). Therefore, kinship care, which is a form of alternative care that includes a permanent solution for the child concerned, formed the basis of this study.

The foster care system in South Africa currently suffers from funding constraints and inadequate resources, with statistics indicating that from the total number of children who need foster care, only a third of them are actually receiving it (Hall 2017; Stein 2015). Children placed in foster care have been taken from their biological parents because of abuse or neglect and most of these children come from historically marginalised communities. Foster children should receive excellent care and placement that puts their needs for development, safety and well-being first. However, studies have shown that the problem of the lack of adequate foster care is not only present in developing countries like South Africa, but is also present in developed nations (Boyle 2017).

In South Africa, Section 157(1)(b)(iii) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 as amended (RSA 2005), alludes to permanency planning and stability for the child in need of care, but falls short in terms of providing the exact guidelines detailing how this permanency and stability can be maintained beyond the child exiting the provisions of the Act (Shaw, Steyn and Simeon 2020). Youths placed in alternative care, who are between the ages of 18 and 21 years, automatically exit care as soon as they are out of school or college, as they no longer meet the provisions of Section 176(1) of the Children's Act (RSA 2005):

> a person placed in alternative care as a child is entitled, after having reached the age of 18 years, to remain in that care until the end of the year in which that person reaches the age of 18 years.
>
> Section 176(2)
>
> … reaches the age of 21 years if (a) the current alternative care-giver is willing and able to care for that person; and (b) the continued stay in that care is necessary to enable the person to complete his or her education or training.

Youths Leaving Kinship Foster Care

The result is that youths leaving kinship foster care (hereafter referred to as care leavers) are left without any form of support from the state when they move out. Care leavers in South Africa are ill-prepared to cope with vulnerabilities such as finding employment, and building and maintaining critical relationships (Tanur 2012).

Globally, South Africa is amongst the nations with the highest population of vulnerable youths (Van Breda and Dickens 2016). Furthermore, a 53.6% unemployment rate amongst South African youth, ranks among the fourth highest in the world (World Bank 2015). This is in stark contrast with the youth unemployment rates in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and Brazil, which stand at 11.5%; 21.6%; 16.3%; and 13.7%, respectively (ILO 2013). Marked differences are also evident in the rates of youths not participating in employment, education, or training (NEET) with South Africa having a rate of 32.2% (Stats SA 2014) compared with 15.9% for the UK, 19.6% for Brazil, 11.8% for Australia, and 16.1% for the US (ILO 2013). According to a report by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2014), over 55.7% of children were living below the poverty line and most of them relied on social grants for survival.

Despite the ideals of the Children's Act (RSA 2005) and the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA 1997), which promote keeping children with their families and communities, many of these young people end up in residential care (Van Breda and Dickens 2016). It is estimated that 150 000 children are living in child-headed households and more than 13 000 children in residential care facilities (Van der Walt 2018). An estimated 345 registered Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) provide care for 21 000 children (Van Der Walt 2018).

In South Africa, care leavers constitute the most vulnerable group of society (Shaw, Steyn and Simeon 2020). The focus of the study was on youths aged between 19 and 26 years. Nineteen years upwards is the most common age at which youths would have left the kinship foster care system to live independently. The study, therefore, sought to explore the challenges experienced by care leavers in South Africa. There is a need to develop a standardised model that will help social workers to render effective services as they prepare care leavers to become independent young adults.

Challenges and Experiences of Care Leavers

Studies have shown that young people raised in foster care are among the most vulnerable groups of people. Usually, children who are placed in foster care have a history of being abused or neglected and the intention of placing them into foster care is to protect them and to safeguard their well-being (Vacca 2018). Unfortunately, their placement in foster care may also bring a sense of uncertainty and an unwanted change within them. Even though young people in foster care differ in terms of personality and how they respond to difficulties, the older youths who are brought into foster care often

experience greater instability, are placed away from family, and must frequently transition to adulthood without getting a legal permanency (Walther 2016).

Foster care was introduced as a short-term solution to neglected, abandoned, orphaned and abused children through the provision of temporary places to stay with the intention of reuniting them with their families later. According to Ntshongwana and Tonga (2018), these children are placed in the care of related or unrelated individuals while waiting to be re-united with their biological families, or the accomplishment of a more permanent form of alternative care. Foster parents have a substantial responsibility of caring for children who are unable to live with their families of origin, many of whom have experienced noteworthy behavioural, emotional and developmental problems. In this caring task, foster parents are regarded as key determinants in child outcomes.

Transitioning to adulthood can be a real challenge for youths, with some youths being more vulnerable than others. Marginalised adults, such as those leaving the foster care system and those with disabilities, are more likely to experience challenges when transitioning to adulthood (Goemans 2018). Despite this, some of these marginalised adults do go on to fare well in adulthood. Care leavers often face challenges, such as behavioural and low-income problems. The development of comprehensive programmes to assist care leavers, is hindered by failing to account for the exact population of these young people (Bender et al. 2015). This is further compounded by the fragmented nature of programmes designed to help marginalised and vulnerable groups in South Africa. This means that young people transitioning to adulthood face obstacles which prevent them from accessing the help they need. There is often limited support for the large numbers of these young people requiring assistance (Lynch et al. 2023).

Homelessness is a common challenge worldwide for foster youths transitioning to adulthood but, in South Africa, this challenge is exacerbated by the lack of adequate housing in the country (Curry and Abrams 2015). In addition to these challenges, previously fostered youths usually have lower educational qualifications, lower salaries and are unemployed when compared to their peers (Curry and Abrams 2015). According to Zinn and Courtney (2017), the problems care leavers encounter are the reason for psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and drug abuse in a bid to self-medicate. Boyle (2017) notes that because of a lack of social support for these groups of people, they end up becoming part of groups that demonstrate deviant behaviour. It is, therefore, imperative that all these challenges are noted so that strategies can be crafted to overcome these problems.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

In the current study, the resilience theory was found to be essential in providing an adequate contextual understanding of the challenges and the factors which lead to a successful transitioning of the youth out of the foster care system. Adler (2014) defines

resilience as an individual's ability to return to previous patterns of competence and variation which characterised the individual before experiencing periods of heavy stress. In essence, the concept of resilience acknowledges an individual's adaptation skills in response to highly stressful situations they may have faced in life. Children who have been exposed to difficult life experiences may exhibit great resilience (Schofield and Beek 2015).

According to Rutter (2012), resilience cannot be considered a fixed characteristic of a person but is an attribute that is subject to change depending on circumstances. He further proposes that an individual can successfully deal with a stressful situation at one point but may also equally fall apart when confronted by the same stressful situation in a different context. Thus, changes in situations may well alter an individual's levels of resilience (Schofield and Beek 2015). Research that has been carried out concerning resilience has been aimed at developing a better understanding of how self-resilience can be enhanced. According to research conducted by Rutter (2012), being able to successfully deal with an adverse family past and accepting their past mistakes, have been considered as some of the greatest achievements by young people who were formerly in foster care.

According to Van Breda (2018), resilience studies are based on three interconnected factors, namely, adversity, mediating factors and outcomes. He emphasises that it is critical to discuss resilience by including these three critical elements. Nonetheless, one challenge with the result component of the pliability process is that, while it stresses that in the end there are positive outcomes which are realised in the face of challenges it falls short of explaining them. The lack of an explanation limits the application of this theory and, therefore, the process definition of resilience is preferable. The resilience theory offers a useful framework for comprehending the difficulties and elements that go into helping young people successfully leave the foster care system. Social workers and other care providers can help youths achieve positive developmental outcomes throughout this crucial life transition by implementing resilience concepts to enhance positive adaptability, strengths and protective factors.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used for the current study. A qualitative research approach is valuable because it fosters a thorough consideration of all facets of reality, the connections among various facets of reality, and produces a more comprehensive knowledge of topics pertaining to life (Padgett 2015). In addition, purposive sampling (Denzin and Lincoln 2014, 234) was employed to select 23 former foster youths aged between 19 and 26 years and whose time in kinship foster care had expired and who were now independent. The Department of Social Development (DSD) assisted the researchers in the recruitment of the care leavers in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, Gauteng, South Africa. The DSD was thus critical for the

study, as it provided the resources necessary to undertake the study. The DSD also provided a list of potential participants who met the study criteria.

The main instrument used to collect data was the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are interviews in which the interviewer does not follow a strict pattern using a list of definite questions (Daining and DePanfilis 2017). In addition, Padgett's (2015) five steps of thematic analysis were used to analyse the data, namely: picking out unit meanings; grouping similar meanings into the same categories and naming these categories; coding each category; re-organising and refining coding; and conceptually classifying the themes and presenting them.

Credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability were some of the techniques used in the study to demonstrate the research rigour for qualitative studies, as per Lincoln and Guba (1985). The process of ensuring trustworthiness involved member checking where findings and interpretations were shared with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the data and resonance with their experiences. The confirmability was ensured by reflecting on the researchers' own biases, assumptions, and influence on the research process. In addition, a reflexive journal was kept throughout the study. To guarantee transferability of the study findings, thick detailed descriptions were made available to allow for a comparison with other similar contexts and allow for judgments to be made about the extent to which the findings fit into other contexts. Lastly, dependability was ensured by maintaining thorough documentation of all research steps, decisions and changes made during the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed by providing the participants with clear and comprehensive information about the study objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants consented to participate by signing the consent form. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the DSD and the researchers received ethical clearance from the University of South Africa on 23 February 2021 (CREC Reference #: 48112542_CREC_CHS_2021).

Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

The themes and subthemes that emerged from the collected data are presented below. The findings are supported by direct citations from participants and, where applicable, integrated with literature. Theme one presents the findings regarding the care leavers' experiences in relation to their access to education and security and parental care. Theme two highlights the challenges that the care leavers faced after, namely, job security and risk of poverty leading to increased vulnerability. Finally, theme three reports on the support services that care leavers required, which include educational and financial support.

Theme 1: Experiences Under Kinship Foster Care

The participants shared various views on their experiences of leaving kinship foster care. Looking at the various views which are presented in the subthemes, it can be concluded that care leavers were able to access education, although some participants reported that they could not complete their secondary education. In addition, the participants shared that foster care provided them with security, parental care and support from social workers. The participants' opinions of their experiences are presented in the following responses.

Subtheme 1.1: Access to Education

According to the study findings, one of the major experiences of the participants was a lack of access to education while in kinship foster care. Some of the participants shared that:

> Everything was good during foster care placement. At least I got a chance to complete grade 12, although to get another chance to rewrite my matric in order to improve my levels was a challenge. (Participant 1; 24 years old).

> I had a chance to learn although l did not complete my studies. (Participant 3; 19 years old)

The age limit, according to the Children's Act, avers that many youths, who are under foster care, fail to complete their secondary education and training as required. Most of the care leavers continue with secondary education beyond the age of 21, while the insufficient support structures and lack of intermediate preliminary programmes for youths, who are moving out of foster care homes, have a tremendous effect on their journey of leaving care, as they are left to face adversity on their own. Section 176 (2) of the Children`s Act (RSA 2005) states that the head of the DSD may extend foster care for a person who is receiving a foster child grant, to remain in the alternative care until the age of 21. This means that young people in foster care will be discharged from the provisions of the Children`s Act when they reach the age of 21 in terms of Section 175.

Subtheme 1.2: Security and Parental Care

Foster care was introduced as a short-term solution for children or youths found to be in the need of care through the provision of temporary places for children to stay with the intention to reunite them with their families later. According to the study findings, children in foster care receive security from all forms of abuse and have the privilege of receiving parental care, even from individuals who are not their biological parents. A kinship foster care arrangement is whereby a child's relative(s), who can be his/her grandparents, cousins, aunts, or uncles, take the responsibility of providing a safe living environment for the child (Hawley 2017). Vacca (2018) notes that the intention of placing children in foster care is to protect them. In addition, to ensure their safety and

that they receive their social needs and love as other children do. Hence, referring to their experiences, the participants shared the following:

> Not all foster parents are good enough to take care of a foster child, thanks to kinship foster care for giving me a sweet and loving parent. (Participant 21; 20 years old)

> I was previously being abused and under kinship foster care I received protection as a girl child and gained a sense of belonging. (Participant 18; 19 years old)

The study findings were in line with (Hegar 2012) who expressed that those strongly in favour of kinship foster care believe that it is beneficial to children, as it reduces the pain of not having biological parents present by providing them with social relationships from the extended family. Hence, this enables social continuity. Nevertheless, some of the participants pointed out that, even if kinship foster care had a lot to offer, it had some disadvantages, such as failure to associate with other youths, a feeling of being insecure such that they had that feeling of not belonging to any social group. Some of the participants also mentioned that due to dependency on only foster care, it made them feel insecure. The responses from some of the participants are captured in the following quotes:

> However, I have experienced that feeling of being insecure. That is, l felt I was not belonging to the same group as other children. (Participant 11; 26 years old)

> Although I had everything I need, sometimes l could feel inferior and could feel that l do not belong to the same group like other children. (Participant 19; 26 years old)

Therefore, according to the research participants` responses, one could note that most of the experiences of youths, under kinship foster care, are that children and youths under foster care or kinship foster care are granted security, care, and protection, even though they do not receive all that they need. The foster care system in South Africa currently suffers from funding constraints and inadequate resources, with statistics indicating that, from the total number of children who need foster care, only a third of them are currently receiving it (Hall 2017; Stein 2015). Hence, some of the children and youths are affected through receiving insufficient aid.

Theme 2: Challenges Faced by Care Leavers

In South Africa, care leavers need strong positive outcomes and achievements to overcome the challenges of leaving kinship foster care. Some care leavers seem to struggle to succeed in life because they are not prepared for the challenges they face after leaving the shelter of foster care. Tanur (2012) has highlighted that youth transitioning out of care have difficulties being optimistic about their future, due to lack of strategic programmes and a shortage of innovations. The following are some of the subthemes that emerged on the challenges faced by youths leaving kinship foster care.

Subtheme 2.1: Job Security

Employment security was one of the challenges that seemed to worry young people who took care of them because of lack of financial support. According to the World Bank (2018), 53.6% of unemployment rests on youths, especially those coming from foster care. The period of transitioning for young foster youths to young adults, is one that can be described as high-risk as there is a greater risk of problems, such as unemployment, imprisonment, mental health problems, homelessness, and drug abuse (Keller et al. 2016). Lack of job security leads the care leavers to have too much free time that leads to boredom, emptiness, and laziness. This may be one of the reasons why young people leaving kinship foster care cannot find employment opportunities, due to their lack of experience and skills in the labour market. Some of the participants shared as follows:

> When I was under foster care, I was receiving foster child grant every month and I would plan my budget and do the savings. Currently, I am unemployed. (Participant 3; 20 years old)

> I started seeing things differently since I was no longer receiving foster child grant. We struggled to put food on the table since my foster parent's foster care grant has also been stopped and I am not working. (Participant 15; 19 years old)

According to the study findings, it is evident that, most of the care levers tend to struggle financially due to lack of jobs. Van Breda and Frimpong-Manso (2020) suggest that youths should be supported with essential life skills that enhance their employability through the acquisition of practical entrepreneurial or professional skills, to help them address some of the challenges they face. It is clear that transitional programmes, designed to help prepare young people whilst they are in kinship foster care and also supporting them after they leave care, are essential for successful independent living.

Subtheme 2.2: High Risk of Poverty Leading to Vulnerability

Youths who have been discharged from the provisions of the Children's Act (RSA 2005), are at risk of experiencing outcomes, such as poverty, ill-health, and poor educational achievements. According to the study findings, most of the youths leaving the foster care system are vulnerable to poverty (Stats SA 2017). This is because of the failure to complete their studies, as well as to acquire necessary life skills to cope with life after foster care. According to Stats SA (2017), there are high levels of lack of education and employment (38.6%) for youths who have aged out of foster care and, as a result, it is not surprising that most of them suffer from socio-economic instability. The participants during interviews mentioned poverty as one of the prevalent challenges they have faced after exiting the foster care system. This was supported by the following responses:

> I am struggling to survive on my own since l did not complete my education. (Participant 10; 23 years old)

> Things are now different since I am no longer receiving foster child grant. At home we struggled to put food on the table since my foster parent and his child were unemployed. Thus, l had to look for a job so that I will be able to take care of the family. (Participant 13; 23 years old)

The findings revealed that participants generally experienced economic and other financially related challenges from exiting the foster care system. However, most of them relied on their strengths and innovations to tap into their environment and take advantage of the available resources and networks that would contribute to their survival and adaptation in the community. Research has proved that many youths, who are out of the foster care system, are doing so with little or no financial assistance and suffer greater poverty (Mogale 2019). In addition, generally high levels of poverty among South African children and adolescents, prevent them from reaching their full potential as young adults because of global economic instability (Goldberg 2013). Therefore, it is rare to expect care leavers to be fully empowered for life after care at the age of 18.

Theme 3: Social Support Services Required by Care Leavers

Support services for care leavers in South Africa, are crucial for their successful transitioning to adulthood. These services should encompass various aspects, such as educational and financial support. Such services should be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific needs of the youths to ensure their well-being and successful integration into society.

Subtheme 3.1: Educational Support

It should be noted that some of the participants showed appreciation for the support they received under foster care especially access to education. Most of the participants stressed the importance of educational support that should be provided by the State, as well as by social workers. In accordance with Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996), everyone has the right to basic education, including basic adult education, and further education, which the State must progressively ensure, through reasonable measures, and accessibility to education. The response of one of the participants is captured in the following quote:

> Kinship foster care has given me a chance to learn in school and where l stay, l have learnt to cook, thus the cooking skill is the one I am applying in the canteen l am currently working at. (Participant 7; 21 years old)

Deriving from the participants' responses, it could be noted that access to education was one of the greatest benefits given to youths under foster care. Through education, some youths felt prepared and ready to be independent, while others felt agitated by the fact that they did not manage to reach the desired levels. This could be one of the reasons

why they face challenges to secure employment because they lack the necessary experience and skills for the labour market. Dickens and Marx (2018) suggest the need for an assessment of whether youths, prior to leaving the foster care system, are working, working full time, working part time, studying full time, studying part time, desire to work, going for a job interviews, and applying for a course.

Subtheme 3.2: Financial Support

Financial support is a grant that was designed to help children who were taken from their homes and placed in foster care, to protect them from abuse or neglect (Hall et al. 2012). The main purpose of the foster care system is to provide financial assistance to a family member who is caring for orphans (Hall et al. 2012). The following participant emphasised the importance of financial support needed by care leavers:

> This is because I do not have confidence in myself. This is because I was used to get free things every month from the foster care and now, I cannot do things on my own. Thus, I am not independent as l am surviving on hand outs from generous people. (Participant 6; 20 years old)

The study findings showed that there is not much that is being done to prepare youths prior to their leaving the foster care system. There is a need to equip them with life skills that are beyond education itself, so that they are fully prepared for adulthood and real-life experiences, without support from foster parents. Most of the responses indicated a challenge with dependency syndrome and failure to adjust to a life without free benefits. During the period when they are due to exit the foster care system, they become indecisive.

Limitations of the Study

The nature of the study was affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic in various aspects. Data collection was limited to telephonic interviews, instead of the normal face-to-face interviews. The pandemic also meant that the researchers were restricted in terms of travelling to minimise either the possible spread of, or contracting the virus, between the researchers and participants. This meant that the researchers could no longer travel to the participants' locations to collect data as previously planned. The study was also limited by time constraints, as the approval process for the proposal stretched a bit longer than anticipated, since the university was also adjusting its operations to the pandemic.

Discussion of the Findings

From the reviewed literature, it was discovered that children in foster care had various experiences depending on the interactions they had within their foster homes. According to research, most children in foster care are not receiving the same treatment as those who live with their biological family, but they do receive protection and a comfortable

living environment (Kheswa 2017). Foster care not only provides temporary care for children, but it also provides them with access to basic education, laying the groundwork for a brighter future and increasing their self-esteem. The level of support for youth educational programmes can be utilised to urge young people to focus positively on life (Dworsky and Gitlow 2017). Knowledge was a highly important service that children in foster care received because, in order to attain a desirable job these days, more education and training is required. As a result, education was a very important service that youths in foster care received.

Children in foster care also received security and safety from all sorts of abuse, according to the findings, and were also able to receive parental care. The goal of placing children in foster care, according to Vacca (2018), is to safeguard them and assure their safety. Organisations, such as CYCCs, or any other organisation acting in that capacity, according to the literature, have a critical role to play in the protection of children's rights at the local level and are thus regarded as essential for the employment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989) guidelines. Therefore, foster care provides the children and youths with the needed protection against abuse and other risks they could have faced if they remained in vulnerable places.

The study findings revealed that most youths exiting foster care face economic challenges such as failure to secure jobs. Due to a lack of employment stability, young people are "left with a lot of free time", which leads to boredom, emptiness and laziness. As per the research results of the literature, young people in foster care confront obstacles, like those faced by other adolescents their age, such as obtaining work; managing tight finances; facing new experiences; and seeking higher learning opportunities (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2018). This puts them in a financial bind. Youths should be helped with basic living skills, enhancing their employability through acquisition of practical entrepreneurial or occupational skills (Van Breda and Frimpong-Manso 2020).

One of the difficulties identified by the study as affecting care leavers, was a high risk of poverty leading to vulnerability. It is hardly surprising that most care leavers suffer from socio-economic instability, according to Stats SA (2018). Children and youths in South Africa are generally poor, which limits their capacity to attain their full potential. Most of them, on the other hand, use their skills and inventions to tap into their surroundings and take advantage of the available resources and networks that would help them to survive and adapt to their new surroundings.

According to the study findings, many youths who leave the foster care system, do so with little or no financial support, putting them in a worse financial position than their counterparts in the general population, who are still financially supported by their parents. When compared to their peers growing up in stable families, care leavers are vulnerable and at risk of undergoing consequences, such as poverty, ill-health, poor

educational achievement, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, interpersonal and societal issues, unemployment, and suicide, according to the available literature (Gray 2012). Therefore, they need to be exposed to protective factors, which are essential for children still under foster care, and those leaving foster care, which include the ability to manage own behaviour and control emotions (self-regulation skills), the ability to nurture and develop positive relationships (relational skills), growing in a positive school environment, and acquiring skills academically.

One of the proposals provided is for social workers to assist and support care leavers for their future through educational support. According to the conclusions of the study, preparation techniques should be implemented sooner rather than later, before teenagers leave the foster care system, so that they can establish themselves and become accustomed to the system. According to research, the level of support for youth educational programmes may be utilised to push youths to make positive choices in their lives (Dworsky and Gitlow 2017). The support that youths receive from their caregivers has a significant impact on their accomplishments.

Additionally, empowerment through skills is one of the suggestions discovered from the available literature and the research primary findings. According to the existing literature, many of these foster youths reach the age of 18 without the skills necessary to survive on their own, as they are typically unprepared to handle life's obstacles (Courtney 2019; Havlicek, Lin and Braun 2016). According to a study on youths leaving care, about 30% of them were unable to settle in one location after leaving care, and many were in desperate need of social assistance (Keller et al. 2016). In addition, a quarter of them became parents, and nearly half of them suffered from health issues, such as depression after leaving care (Keller et al. 2016). The availability of some basic living skills and practical skills can help care leavers with the information they need to meet their goals and build confidence when facing challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Foster care services are designed to safeguard and care for children and teenagers who have been exposed to trauma, have been orphaned, or have been subjected to any type of abuse (Masha and Botha 2021). The existing South African foster care system, however, is not designed to promote the effective and successful transition of youths in kinship foster care to adulthood, according to the study. It can be concluded that youths leaving kinship foster care were able to access education, though, several of them could not complete their secondary education. In addition, youths leaving kinship foster care were indeed provided with security or parental care and support from social workers, while they were still under foster care. Youths leaving kinship foster care are struggling to succeed in life because they are not well prepared for independent living. Regarding social support services, it can be concluded that youths leaving kinship foster care did receive educational and financial support. Though, a number of them reported that they

did not complete secondary education and as a result were struggling to find employment.

Most youths leaving kinship foster care face a variety of issues, including unemployment and homelessness, because they lack financial security and are thus prone to poverty. Inadequate social work support services and a lack of after-care programmes for care leavers, have a significant impact on their transition to adulthood. It may be concluded that, while care leavers have a variety of life experiences, the scope of their difficulties has not been exhaustively studied.

In addressing the experiences of care leavers in Johannesburg, based on the study findings and conclusions, the following recommendation can be made: developing a standardised model for preparing care leavers to become independent young adults in ensuring consistency, effectiveness, and quality in social work practice. The model can include the following: assessment and individualised planning; life skills training; mentorship and support networks; housing and financial assistance; education and employment support; as well as health and well-being services. By developing a standardised model for preparing youths leaving kinship foster care to become independent adults, social workers can ensure that they all receive consistent, comprehensive, and high-quality support as they transition to adulthood, ultimately improving their outcomes and promoting their long-term success and well-being.

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