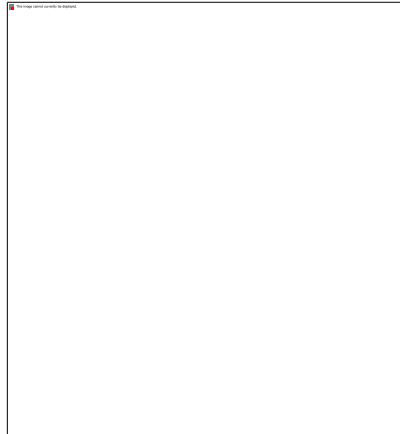


**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**



**EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT CARE LEAVERS DISCHARGED FROM  
RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES: A CASE OF MUSHAWEVANA  
CHILDREN'S HOME**

**A DISSERTATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BACHELOR OF SCIENCE  
HONORS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK**

**BY**

**B200741B**

## **DECLARATION FORM**

I, Maina Munda hereby declare that this dissertation submitted to Bindura University of Science Education has never been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that this is my own work in design and execution and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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MUSHAWEVANA CHILDREN'S HOME**

**DEGREE TITLE : BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN  
SOCIAL WORK**

**YEAR OF COMPLETION : 2024**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Mr and Mrs Munda

## ABSTRACT

*The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities, a case of Mushawevana home in Marondera. The objectives of the research were to explore the socio-economic experiences of adult care leavers after discharge, the coping strategies of care leavers after being discharged and strategies to improve the welfare of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities. For this academic study, the researcher used the resilience theory. A qualitative research approach was used together with a phenomenological research design. The target population for the study were care leavers discharged from Mushawevana Children's Home in Marondera and a key informant from the Department of Social Development. Purposive sampling was used to select both the care leavers and key informant. In terms of data collection, the researcher utilized qualitative in-depth interviews to collect data from participants and key informants. The data was analyzed using interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) where themes were generated from the data. Socio-economic experiences of care leavers explored included their access to accommodation, employment, social support, social interactions, education and training after discharge from residential child care facilities. The coping strategies of care leavers after discharge comprise of support from government and residential child care facility, self-reliance, utilization of social skills and family support. In light of these findings, the study proffered transitional housing for discharged care leavers with life skills training, financial assistance through cash transfers for a period of time, individualized transitional planning with interventions targeted to address specific needs of each individual and continued post discharge counselling. The study also recommends for the development of a comprehensive policy that address the needs of care leavers after discharge, partnership of government and non-governmental organizations to ensure continued educational support for care leavers, psychosocial support from social workers and creation of Care Leavers' Network*

*in each town and city that represents other care leavers through advocacy of improved service delivery.*

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter comprises introduction and the background to the study of experiences of young adult care leavers after discharge from child care facilities. It also includes statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, definition of key terms and the chapter summary.

### **1.2. BACKGROUND**

In Zimbabwe, institutionalization is still a common form of child welfare for young people without family care, yet a handful of studies exist on the institutional care experiences. According to the National Orphan Care Policy (1999), child welfare policy in Zimbabwe functions on a six-tier safety net system which places the biological family and extended family as first options of care for children needing alternative care. However due to the dearth of extended family, families have been disintegrated leaving children in vulnerable situations that ultimately result in them being placed under institutional care. According to the research by Hojer and Sjoblom in 2014, being placed in public care implies that children often experience various significant transitions, such as moving from their parents' home to foster or residential care facilities, and even moving between different foster homes or residential placements on multiple occasions. This upheaval also requires them to change schools in the process, forcing them to leave behind friends and break important relationships and attachments. These changes come with traumatic experiences due to loss of connections that would have been made. These traumatic experiences manifest as insecure attachments to the care leavers after discharge. Traumatic separation may eventually result in depression, withdrawal or rejection behavior. These attachment difficulties may also lead to mental health problems among care leavers.

The issue of care leaving has emerged as a matter of significant international relevance and a growing social problem (Boldis, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014) and according to Geiger and Schelbe (2014), in the United States alone, it is estimated that over 415, 129 children are placed in foster care, with between 20 000 to 30 000 youth leaving the care system each year. According to Cashmore and Paxman (2017), extensive international research from the US Western Europe and Australia has indicated that care leavers often struggle with various aspects of their lives including their health, education, housing and employment, primarily because they experience “instant adulthood” at a young age, ranging from 16 to 18 years old, without proper preparation and adequate support. In recognition of these challenges countries like the UK and US have implemented legislative measures to provide funding for programs and services to support care leavers, such as the U.S Fostering Connections to Success and the Increasing Adoptions Act, which has extended services for youth leaving care up to the age of 21 (Stein & Munro, 2008; Schelbe, 2011). However, according to Paulsen and Berg (2016), care leavers often fail to take advantage of these services due to their eagerness to break away from state structures.

Regionally, there is a high number of orphaned, abandoned, abused, and neglected children who are placed under institutional care, often due to issues like poverty, substance abuse, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, according to Freidus (2010), there are fewer researchers in Africa that examine the transition experiences of youth as they leave this institutionalized care. This indicates a need for welfare organizations across Africa to review their policies and address the specific welfare needs of young adult care leavers as they transition to independent living. Mhongera's (2016) research in Zimbabwe further highlights this issue, noting that adolescents who turn 18 and leave institutional care often lack adequate preparation and face a high risk of destitution and segregation in their new surroundings. To address this, Mhongera

recommends that an inclusive social safety net system should be developed to ensure that youth leaving care are properly prepared and supported for independent living. This suggests a critical gap in services and support for care leavers that needs to be addressed at a regional level in Africa.

Furthermore, according to Bond (2017), in South Africa compared to Western countries, few authors examine the experiences of youths leaving care to prepare them to develop positive self-identity and building resilience. There is therefore need to continue exploring experiences of adult care leavers to promote independent living. According to a study by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2017), about 70% of young people leaving care in Botswana had no access to employment or further education. Additionally, only 10% of young people leaving care in Botswana had access to social housing whilst many experienced homelessness. According to Mhike (2017), 90% of young adults leaving care in Botswana did not have access to any type of support, such as family friends or community groups. It is against this background that this study seeks to explore the experiences of young adult care leavers. It is imperative for a substantive policy to be put in place that will help social workers to deliver services and enough support to the care leavers so that they become economically active members.

### **1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The transition from institutionalization to independent living can be a complex process for the young adult care leavers who are often ill-prepared and lack necessary support networks. Care leavers should have access to a wide range of services that would help them adapt to life outside of institutions. This include access to mental health services, academic support, health-care, housing, employment so that they can be self-reliant among other services and skills they need to acquire. However, the government has not implemented a comprehensive policy that addresses the specific needs of care leavers. Additionally, the challenging economic conditions



in the country, including generational poverty, often result in limited opportunities for those leaving institutional care to return to their original families. Due to the dearth of the extended family most adult care leavers experience “instant adulthood” whereby they are discharged and have to map their way in the world without the help and guidance of relatives. These circumstances increases their vulnerability leading most of them to experience difficulties in finding employment opportunities, conducive accommodation, access to healthcare services, access to identity documents, poverty and identity crisis. There is need for a conducive policy that inform transitional planning and aftercare services for young adult care leavers.

#### **1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY**

The study aims to capture detailed narratives of young adult care leavers on their socio-economic experiences after discharge from Mushawevana Children’s Home

#### **1.5. OBJECTIVES**

1. To explore the experiences of adult care leavers regarding access to accommodation, employment, social support, social interactions, education and training after discharge from residential child care facilities
2. To assess care leavers’ coping strategies after leaving care.
3. Strategies to improve the welfare of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities.

#### **1.6 JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In Zimbabwe young adult care leavers have different experiences after discharge from Children’s Homes and these experiences are a result of institutionalization. According to Rojon and Saunders (2012), researchers often pursue studies to develop an overview of current discussions on a subject, how the investigation may contribute to existing knowledge, fill a gap, add a new perspective, or validate existing ideas. While research has been conducted on

the experiences of care leavers in the USA, UK, and Australia, there is still limited research covering the lived experiences of young adults after they are discharged from institutional care in Zimbabwe. This study aims to explore the unique experiences of care leavers in Zimbabwe and identify gaps in existing support programs and policies.

Furthermore, this study will help to inform conducive policies and programs that address the specific needs of young adult care leavers. This study aims to explore the experiences and coping mechanisms adopted by young adult care leavers after they are discharged from residential child care facilities. This research will also contribute to the Marondera community through the academic publication that will shed more light on how care leavers integrate into the outside world after discharge from a child care institution.

In addition, the study seeks to contribute to the larger body of knowledge by exploring long term effects of institutionalization on young adult care leavers. According to Powell et al (2004), the Zimbabwean Orphan Care Policy of 1999 suggests using institutional care as a last and temporary option, but many children are continuously placed in institutions and remain there long-term. Kelleher et al (2000) note that children without care histories tend to disengage from their families much later and often do not fully disconnect from family support. However, it is concerning to think that individuals are discharged from institutional care at 18 years old, as this raises doubts about their ability to cope independently when they exit care. The research will also make notable recommendations for aftercare policy and transitional services provision for young adult care leavers in Zimbabwe.

More so, this study seeks to give young adult care leavers the opportunity to express themselves, articulate their experiences and also share what they expect from their service providers so that they can have a smooth transitioning. The government of Zimbabwe put in place a number of policies meant to address the needs of care leavers and these include; the

National Care Policy, the National Youth Policy, Children's Act and National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children. All these policies are positive steps in addressing the needs of care leavers, however, their implementation has been limited in scope and scale and has not been able to ensure that the care leavers have positive outcomes. It is the purpose of this study to inform programs that can be put in place and ensure positive outcomes for young adult care leavers.

## **1.7. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **1.7.1 Care leaver**

A care leaver is a young adult who has previously lived in the care system, away from their family, which include foster care, residential child care facilities, supported housing services or other arrangements made by their probation worker. In Zimbabwe as per section 24 (1)a of the Children's Act (5:06), a child who has reached the age of 18 years should be discharged from residential care.

### **1.7.2 Residential care**

According to Lee and Barth (1999), the term residential child care facilities refers to a range of different types of out-of-home care settings for children who cannot live with their families. Additionally, child care facilities may be known by various names, including children's homes, residential treatment centers, group homes, and youth centers.

### **1.7.3 Institution**

The study by Whittaker (2014) uses the terms "orphanage" and "residential care facilities" interchangeably. The term "orphanage" is often used, even though not all the children in these care settings are actually orphans. The more general term "institution" is commonly used to refer to these group care settings.

## **1.8. DISSERTATION OUTLINE**

**Chapter one** details the background of the study as a whole. It also outlines the introduction, statement of the problem

**Chapter two** outlines the theoretical framework of this study and reviews the Resilience model and focuses particularly on how the theory was used in this study. The literature review is on

the experiences of young adult care leavers, detailing the services they are provided with when they leave care, the challenges they face and their coping mechanisms. International, regional and national legislative instruments concerning life outside the perimeters of residential child care facilities are also reviewed in this chapter.s

**Chapter three** details the research paradigm that informed this study. It outlines the methodology of the study. The chapter explores the research design and the rationale for employing the design. The chapter also reviews the sampling procedures, the data collection methods used, data collection methods used, data collection tools, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations of the study.

**Chapter four** focuses on presentation, analysis and discussion of the data collected through the use of qualitative methods.

**Chapter five** presents a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.9. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an overview of the study's components, which included the introduction, background of the study, the statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study, justification and the significance of the study and definition of key terms.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews existing literature on experiences of young adult care leavers after discharged from residential child care facilities.

### **2.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1.1 Resilience theory**

The study on young adult care leavers uses resilience theory as its framework. Resilience refers to the ability to cope positively despite adversity, according to Rutter (2012). Coping strategies provide evidence of the processes that contribute to resilience, per Frydenberg (2017). The study aims to explore the coping techniques used by young adults after leaving care, drawing on resilience literature. Research from Zimbabwe, as cited by Breda (2016), suggests that both individual agency and structural factors are important for successful transitions from care. Despite facing adverse circumstances, some care leavers exhibit resilience and navigate toward better outcomes. As noted by Bukuluki et al. (2020), some care leavers achieve high educational qualifications, are in stable marriages, and do not use drugs.

According to Taormina (2015), resilience is based on an individual's self-assurance and capacity to suffer, adjust, and recover from misfortune. Taormina identifies four key dimensions of resilience:

- i. Determination - This refers to an individual's self-discipline, steadfastness, and commitment to driving forward and succeeding.
- ii. Endurance - This describes an individual's personal strength and grit to withstand upsetting circumstances without giving up.
- iii. Adaptability - This is the ability to be flexible and creative, to adapt to challenging environments, and to adjust oneself to fit any situation.

- iv. **Recuperability** - This is the capacity to recover, both physically and mentally, from different types of harm, setbacks, or troubles in order to return to one's normal state.\

Furthermore, when using the resilience model to explain how care leavers reintegrate into society after residential care, the focus has been on identifying and investigating the factors that enable young care leavers to cope with the transition to adulthood and independence (Rafaeli, 2017). Resilience theory can help identify and evaluate the primary coping behaviors that care leavers exhibit when facing challenges associated with emerging adulthood.

Individuals who demonstrate resilience, as described by Bandura (1997) and Wu et al. (2013), are able to successfully adapt to crises or hardships in their lives and have effective coping mechanisms. According to Rafaeli (2017), protective factors are resources that can foster resilience in people who have experienced risk and adversity. These protective factors aid in coping during or after traumatic events, rather than shielding people from the risks or traumas themselves. Rafaeli (2017) broadly categorizes these protective factors into three groups: personal resources, support from family, and support from close friends. These various protective factors help facilitate resilience and successful coping among young care leavers as they transition to independent adulthood.

- i. **Personal Resources**-The importance of personal resources like mastery, self-efficacy, and self-esteem in fostering resilience is highlighted by researchers like Jacelon (1997) and Stein (2008). The process by which one's personal resources activate and strengthen their belief in their own abilities to handle future challenges, despite past difficulties, can explain their capacity to cope positively with adversity. Studies have shown that personal resources like self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy favorably impact care leavers' adjustment and reintegration.

- ii. **Family Support**-While resilience theory emphasizes the crucial protective role that parental and family support can have for care leavers, it is unclear how their contact with biological relatives will affect them. Some research, like that by Gwenzi (2018), suggests families are taking measures to assist care leavers after discharge. But the impact of family connections can be positive, negative, or neutral. Gwenzi (2018) notes that care leavers' vulnerability and susceptibility to challenges appears to be increasing.
- iii. **Support from Significant Others**-Few studies have looked at the beneficial role friends can play in fostering resilience during reintegration, as described by Hiles et al. (2013). Care leavers are said to rely on each other for both financial and psychological support as they reintegrate, according to Perez and Romo (2011). This peer support and mutual optimism helps overcome fears and enables care leavers to succeed in their transitions.

## **2.2 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CARE LEAVERS**

Care leavers are young adults discharged from different residential child care facilities upon reaching the age of 18. These facilities include family like care institutions, foster care and dormitory child care facilities. According to the Care Leavers' Association (2014), a 'care leaver' refers to an adult who spent time living in foster care, residential care, or other arrangements outside of their biological family or extended family before reaching the age of 18.

## **2.3. EXPERIENCES OF ADULT CARE LEAVERS AFTER DISCHARGE FROM RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES**

Research indicates that young people transitioning out of residential child care often face significant challenges. Havlicek (2011) found that care leavers in the USA and other Western countries commonly struggle with accessing housing, education, employment, and earning



lower incomes compared to their peers from low-income families without care experience. Rudnicki (2012) further noted high rates of unemployment (22-55%) and incarceration (18-26%) among youth leaving care. Additionally, O'Donnell (2020) highlighted that the quality and availability of governmental "aftercare" support for care leavers varies across and within European nations. However, Lee and Berrick (2014) point out that while care leavers face high risks of adverse adult outcomes, they also have opportunities for positive changes and developing stability in young adulthood. Social Care Ireland (2015) noted that care leavers in Ireland can receive rent subsidies, but may still face difficulties finding affordable, suitable housing. According to Pinkerton and Rooney (2014), in developed countries this interest in care leavers has led to policy and legislative reform particularly in the United Kingdom.

Regionally, over the last few decades there has been limited studies regarding the experiences of young adults after leaving care and this has mostly emerged from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Ghana. Regionally, care leavers experience difficulties re-integrating into society in terms of employment, housing and social interaction. They often lack sufficient social and cultural skills when they are discharged from residential child care facilities. Tolfree (1995) described young people leaving institutional care in developing countries as "parentless, rootless, and often ill prepared for adult life." The environment into which care leavers exit influences their response to the transition. According to Ucembe (2013) and Van Breda (2014), children in African nations typically originate from deprived environments marked by high rates of criminality, extreme poverty and lack of utilities. Mhongera and Lombard (2016) found that leaving care makes people more vulnerable because they return to the same deplorable contexts that brought them into care with little or no support.

Furthermore, Van Breda et al. (2017) highlight a lack of research on South African individuals who transition out of residential care and become independent. While it is acknowledged that care leavers often face negative outcomes, some individuals have shown resilience. Messay

and Takele (2019) point out the absence of an independent legal framework addressing the challenges faced by institutional care leavers. Gwenzi (2018) notes that the absence of well-defined rules for assistance and care puts care leavers in Sub-Saharan Africa at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in more developed regions. The Ministry of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare's inability to cover the aftercare expenses for care leavers worsens this situation. Additionally, Gwenzi (2020) emphasizes the lack of comprehensive studies on the delivery of social benefits, stating that care leavers lose all government support immediately upon discharge from facilities at the age of 18. This implies a lack of social protection mechanisms specifically designed to support care leavers. According to Dziro and Rufurwokuda (2013), Zimbabwean care leavers experienced issues in their communities, particularly with personal relationships mostly because they are seen as anti-social and lack Ubuntu.

In Zimbabwe there have been different studies carried out to explore the experiences of young adult care leavers. Kamete (2006) discovered that a significant portion of street youths in inner city Harare were former residents of children's homes, comprising about one-third of the street youth population. These young individuals were classified as an "underclass" in his research, living and working on the streets under deprived conditions. Dziro and Rufurwokuda (2013) conducted a study specifically focusing on the challenges faced by young women in Harare after leaving institutional care. They found that these girls experienced stigmatization from the community, as they were perceived as a "threat" due to their upbringing in institutional settings, which was believed to shape their behavior in a particular manner. Powell et al. (2004) conducted a study on institutional care in Zimbabwe and observed that only 40% of the institutions they examined had formal programs designed to address the vocational skill and transitional support needs of the residents. However, all the institutions acknowledged the importance of such programs. The Zimbabwean Orphan Care Policy stipulates that a transition

program should offer separate housing, increased responsibility, and greater independence for youths aged 16 and above to manage their daily lives. According to Powell et al. (2004:31), these youths should receive a monthly budget for grocery purchases and are expected to have more freedom of movement and interaction with the surrounding community. However this kind of assistance is not always available for adult care leavers after they are discharged. There has not been much research in Zimbabwe concerning the plight of the LGBTQ+ care leavers. It is difficult in Zimbabwe to explore the experiences of this community because the society and the laws has not yet approved the occurrence of “unnatural” relationships therefore most of them stay in hiding for fear of discrimination. Most of them face discrimination and stigma especially when they reintegrate into the communities and this results in negative outcomes.

It is however of paramount importance to note that literature review has highlighted gaps concerning the experiences of young adult care leavers in low and middle income countries including in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Studies on the experiences of care leavers have not put much focus on the plight of the disabled and the Lesbians, Gays, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) care leavers. Research on the experiences of young adult care leavers in Zimbabwe has also focused on the plight of those staying in Harare and now small towns like Marondera. There is also not enough research on the far reaching impact of leaving care and how their experiences may impact their health wellbeing overtime.

## **2.4. TO ASSESS CARE LEAVERS’ COPING STRATEGIES AFTER LEAVING CARE**

### **2.4.1 Provision of Social grants by Government and Sustainable livelihoods projects**

According to Van Breda and Dickens, citing Patel, Hochfield, Graham, and Selipsicki (2008), the South African government provides social payments to assist care leavers as a means of reducing their poverty. However, a study by Bond (2010) revealed that only a small percentage of care leavers actually receive transitional support services. The study involved ten young individuals who had left residential care five years prior, and it emphasized the importance of

stability for successful adjustment after leaving care. The participants highlighted various coping mechanisms such as self-efficacy, hope, and religion that helped them navigate the transition. Another study conducted by Mmusi (2013), a graduate student of Van Breda, explored the coping strategies employed by care leavers. It found that these individuals utilized the social skills they acquired during their time in residential care, adapting them to meet the demands of the "real world." Mamelani, an organization based in the Western Cape, supports young people transitioning out of residential care. Their notable contribution lies in recognizing that leaving care signifies a shift from independent living to interdependent living, drawing on the concept of Ubuntu, which emphasizes interdependence. Through programs like Project Lungisela (meaning "ready" in Xhosa), Mamelani has made significant strides in developing culturally appropriate care leaving practices in South Africa. Project Lungisela specifically assists care leavers in adjusting to community life after leaving residential care. Hlungwani and Van Breda (2018) further observe that while there are similarities in the challenges faced by care leavers worldwide, there are disparities in the accessibility of support systems. Countries like the USA, UK, and Australia have relatively robust formal support systems to facilitate successful reintegration, whereas care leavers in resource-poor countries have limited access to transitional support. In Zimbabwe however the Child Care Grants provides cash transfers to support children below the age of 18 not young adult care leavers. On the positive side there are organizations that cater for sustainable livelihood projects for the care leavers. An example, is the Youth Development Trust which offers vocational training, micro-enterprise development and other support services. These projects help the care leavers to cope and adapt to independent life.

#### **2.4.2 Self-reliance**

This involves overcoming obstacles based on one's capacity to "encourage oneself and be resolute." Young adult care leavers may struggle with feelings of insecurity and doubt in their

own abilities. This is normal as they would not have had the same support systems as other young adults. However, by developing self-reliance and focusing on their own skills and strengths, they can build confidence in themselves and feel more secure. According to Charlton and Wright (2010), in Zimbabwe some care leavers have found success in starting their own businesses whilst others find meaningful work through job placement programs. To supplement their little income, some take part-time jobs, while others choose to keep to themselves. According to Bloom (2013), self-reliance is the greatest coping mechanism that an individual can cultivate to increase their ability to overcome adversity. Her research also shows that the more self-reliant a young adult is, the less likely they are to suffer from symptoms of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Research also shows that young care leavers in Mozambique utilize self-reliance to cope with the transition to independent life. According to Savevska, Williams and Gomes (2012), in Mozambique there is the Centro Terra Viva (CTV) that has been working to promote self-reliance among young people leaving care since 2006. The CTV program provides vocational training and life skills workshops to help young people develop the skills they need to find work and live independently. Similarly, the Foyer Federation has worked to support young people leaving care in the United Kingdom by helping them gain independence through a variety of means including housing, education and employment. They have created foyers which are unique living spaces that provide a supportive environment for young people to learn new skills and gain experience while living on their own. However research shows that not many care leavers are able to utilize this mechanism. Due to institutionalization many individuals develop a dependency syndrome and fail to be self-reliant.

### **2.4.3 Utilization of social skills**

Care leavers are able to cope with the challenges they face in their daily lives after leaving care through their social skills and the resources they garner on their own. Lombe (2014), asserts

that care leavers in Zimbabwe often rely on their social skills to cope with the transition process. Some care leavers have been reported to join peer support groups such as the Child and Youth Care Workers Association of Zimbabwe, to help them navigate the challenges of adulthood. Besides the formal and informal skills, some care leavers are able to utilize skills they acquired whilst still institutionalized. In agreement, Van Breda and Mmusi (2017), in particular, identified that some young people have been able to cope through the application of skills learnt whilst in care to generate income for themselves and their survival. Van Breda (2015) suggests that care leavers demonstrate a process of actively cultivating a resilient belief in their capacity to overcome challenges, which is reflected in the hope they exhibit. According to Nderu, Mwangi and Porter (2015), in Kenya the government has established a program called the transitional Assistance Support Program (TASP), which provides a variety of services to help care leavers make a successful transition to independent living. Similarly in Tanzania a program called the Kilimani project helps care leavers develop skills and networks that can support them in the future. This is also the case for developed countries like the United Kingdom and Canada where many rely on friends and community organizations to help them adjust to life outside of care. However social skills on their own are not enough to navigate in the “real world”, not all care leavers can rely on family and community based organizations. There is need for support from the child care facilities in which the care leavers would have been discharged from and also support from the government to ensure there is smooth transitioning to independent life.

#### **2.4.4 Reliance on family and sociocultural networks**

Studies have noted the importance of family and sociocultural networks as a coping strategy for care leavers. According to Leinonen and Salmi (2017), care leavers in the UK rely on their extended families for financial, emotional and practical support whilst others have sought out support from other people from their community who have also been through the care system.

This can include support groups, mentors and faith-based organizations. Re-unification with family after leaving care helps the care leavers to have an identity and a sense of belonging therefore helping them to cope with life outside of institutions. In Canada there has been a growing recognition of the importance of family and socio-cultural networks in supporting care leavers as they transition to independence. According to Wake and Parton (2016), in Ontario Canada, the Supporting Connections program was established to help youths in care and former youths in care connect with their family and community networks. The program provides a variety of programs including financial support, counseling and cultural events to help youths develop strong connections with their family and community. Takele and Kotecho (2020) highlight that care leavers in Ethiopia prioritize reconnecting with their families to fulfill their need for identity and a sense of belonging, even though this may pose challenges to certain aspects of their lives, such as education. Similarly, Bukuluki et al. (2020) provide evidence supporting the significance of social support from family and community networks for successful transition out of care. In Zimbabwe, children's villages like SOS adopt a gradual approach to reintegrating care leavers with their relatives, rather than abrupt reunification. This approach serves as an effective coping strategy for care leavers as they receive emotional and financial support from their families

## **2.5. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE WELFARE OF YOUNG ADULT CARE LEAVERS AFTER DISCHARGE FROM RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES.**

A number of strategies can be adopted to support young adult care leavers after they are discharged from residential child care facilities. One of those strategies include transition planning. Transition planning involves creating care plans that cater for individuals at personal level, outlining steps on how support can be rendered to individuals to ensure successful transitioning out of care. According to an article by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2017), the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare developed a set of

guidelines for municipalities to support young adults leaving care, including transition planning and aftercare services. These services include assistance with developing social networks and building connections to the community, support for physical and mental health needs among others. According to an article by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (2018), Australian government has implemented a National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, which includes a focus on transitioning from out-of-home care to independent living. The initiative by the Australian government helps to ensure young people make a successful transition to adulthood. To ensure successful transitioning of adult care leavers, the Zimbabwean government also need to adopt the same initiatives and work on improving transitional planning for young people. There is need to establish and create clear policies and standards for transitional planning. The Zimbabwean government through the Department of Social Development can also provide funding for aftercare services like education and training. The Department of Social Development can also partner with local communities and organizations and track progress of the care leavers.

In addition, there is also transitional housing as a strategy to improve the welfare of adult care leavers. This initiative provides young adults with safe and supportive places to stay as they will be transitioning from institutionalization to independent living. It includes access to support services such as counseling, education and job training. Globally, the France government has implemented a program called "Accompagnement des Personnes dans leur Sortie de la Protection (ASP)". According to de Zafra (2017), the ASP program provides support to young adults who have left care, including those who have experienced difficulties during transitioning period. According to Zafra the program provides a variety of services, including counseling, financial support, vocational training and it is available in all French regions and is funded by the French government. Likewise in the UK the government provides funding to support care leavers in transitional housing including counseling, education and job



training. In Ghana this strategy has been adopted as evidenced by Princess Marie Louise Children's Home in Accra which provides housing for young adult care leavers no longer eligible for institutional care. According to Akrofi (2014), the home provides education and training to the care leavers. The Zimbabwean government has established a National Child Welfare Committee responsible for developing policies and programs to support and address the needs of adult care leavers. However, this Committee does not specifically focus on providing transitional housing. The Zimbabwean government need to partner with non-governmental organizations that work to improve the welfare of young adult care leavers and build new housing units that would be used as transitional houses. There is need to make sure this strategy is comprehensive and device new programs to offer skills training to the young people and other support services so that they become self-reliant individuals.

Furthermore, there is also need for financial assistance to the young adult care leavers as a strategy to improve their welfare after they are discharged from child care facilities. Financial support can be in the form of cash transfers, vouchers and in-kind support. According to Schellinger (2008), one such program in Uganda is the Uganda Youth Fund which provides loans, grants and training to youths who would have been through the child and youth care system. In the United States of America, according to National Foster Care Coalition (2017), the Foster Care Independence Program (FCIP) was established in 1999 as part of the Foster Care Independence Act. The program provides financial assistance to help young people become independent adults. One key component is the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) which provides vouchers to help with expenses such as housing, education and transportation. The aim being that of ensuring that youth's transition successfully from institutionalization to independent living. In Zimbabwe there is need for a conducive Child Protection Cash Transfer program. There is need to ensure that the most vulnerable youths receive this cash by using a means test to determine eligibility as the experiences of care

leavers differ after they are discharged from child care facilities. This would ensure that those who are in most need receive the benefit. Since there would be a means test, the amount of cash transfer could also be increased and a system of monitoring and evaluation could be put in place to track the impact of the program.

More so, there is need to increase the access of mental health services and post discharge counseling for care leavers. Despite organizations that are there that offer these services like Zimbabwe Association of Mental Health (ZAMH), Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC), and other organizations they are still limited in scope and scale because there are not enough trained mental health professionals. In Zimbabwe these services are mostly centralized in Harare and other major cities and this can make it difficult for those in small towns like Marondera and rural areas to access these services. There is need to decentralize these services to other areas and increase funding for these services both from the government and from private donors. There is also need to conscientize the care leavers about the availability of these services so that they can seek to access them. The Zimbabwean government can also develop a conducive policy to ensure wide coverage of these services to all care leavers around Zimbabwe.

In summation there is need for implementation of different strategies for the benefit of care leavers after they would have been discharged. Improving the welfare of young adult care leavers requires a combination of stable housing, employment support, peer mentorship, integrated health services, and systemic policy changes. By addressing these areas, we can help ensure that care leavers have the resources and support they need to thrive in their transition to adulthood.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the qualitative research methodology employed in the study. It delves into the research design, the study population, the sampling techniques utilized, the study setting, data collection methods and tools employed, approaches to data presentation and analysis, ethical considerations upheld and the limitations and delimitations taken into account throughout the research process.

### **3.1. RESEARCH APPROACH**

The study employed a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for capturing the perspectives and lived experiences of participants, providing a contextualized understanding of human behavior. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research excels at exploring and comprehending the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research is more open-ended and engaging, both physically and emotionally, with the use of open ended questions that allow for deeper probing. This approach yields detailed verbal descriptions, case studies, settings, and insights obtained through direct interaction, interviewing and observation of the social phenomena under investigation.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design as defined by Burns and Grove (2005), encompasses the overall format and theoretical structure that guides the study's implementation, including the selection of participants, the methods for data collection to address the research questions and the justifications for the choices made by the researcher. In this case the study will utilize a case study design, which, as Creswell (2014) describes, is a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of a specific case, such as a project event, process, activity, or individual. This design was chosen to enable a deep examination of the central research problem, that is, the experiences of young adults after leaving care at the Mushawevana Children's Home. The case study approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **3.3. STUDY SETTING**

The research was conducted in Nyameni, a high density suburb in Marondera. The town is located in Mashonaland East Province, whilst the suburb is situated about 3km from the Marondera central business district. Mushawevana Children's Home was chosen as it is a residential child care facility that is well established and has been operating for some years. Mushawevana provides both a place of safety and temporary residence to children in need of care whilst their circumstances are being reviewed. To best capture the experiences of both young and older care leavers this place was ideal as some of the children that has been placed under its care and discharged has age ranges that reaches up to 40 years. Mushawevana also offers transitional housing where children without foster parents and traceable relatives can stay for a period of 1 year after being discharged. Though there are not yet life skills training at the transitional house it is still a plausible move. Majority of residential child care facilities in Zimbabwe do not offer such services and this motivated the researcher to use Mushawevana as a case study.

### **3.4. TARGET POPULATION**

Barbour (2014), defines a target population as the total collection of components on which one opts to make some inferences. The study will focus on 19-30 year-old males and females who had been discharged from Mushawevana Children's Home. The researcher chose those age groups so as to focus on people who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood as this is a significant phase in a person's life. The researcher will engage 4 male care leavers and also 4 female care leavers so as to maintain a balance in gender and also their perspectives. People within this age range would have recently experienced the process of being discharged from a children's home therefore their experiences are relevant to the research topic.

### **3.5. SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE**

The study utilized a non-probability sampling approach, specifically purposive sampling and availability sampling, to select the study participants. As Engel and Schutt (2013) explain, sampling in social sciences allows for the collection of information about a population without studying the entire population. Purposive sampling, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), is a technique used in exploratory research where data analysis responds to emerging concepts and themes. In this case the researcher purposively selected 8 young adult care leavers from the Mushawevana Children's Home base on their experiences after discharge, as Babbie (2008) notes, this allows the researcher to choose participants they believe will provide information that addresses the research objectives.

Additionally, the study employed availability sampling, as per Creswell's (2014) definition, a non-probability method that relies on conveniently accessible participants, to supplement the purposive sample and further enhance the data collection process.

### **3.6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

#### **3.6.1 In-depth Interviews**

The researcher utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. As described by Abawi (2018), in-depth interviews involve one-on-one conversations that provide participants the opportunity to elaborate on their perspectives and experiences in great detail. The use of interview guides facilitated the building of rapport between the researcher and participants, enabling the collection of rich, nuanced information. The face-to-face nature of interviews allowed the researcher to observe and interpret nonverbal cues, which informed further probing and a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

### **3.6.2 Key informant interviews**

In addition to the in-depth interviews, with the young care leavers, the researcher will also conduct key informant interviews, a qualitative approach described by Creswell (2018) that involves interviewing individuals with specialized knowledge about the community or phenomenon under study. According to Engel and Schutt (2013), the purpose of key informant interviews is to gather rich data from professionals and experts. In this case the researcher interviewed one social worker employed by the Department of Social Development, complementing the data collected from the care leavers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and issues surrounding the transition from care.

### **3.6.3 Research instruments**

The researcher will make use of interview guides to gather data from selected participants and key informants. Open-ended questions will be used to explore the experiences of young adult care leavers and also the perspectives of key informants. The researcher will make use of interview guides because they do not limit the interviewee to give detailed responses and they allow for collection of in-depth data. Interview guides are however, more time consuming than questionnaires.

## **3.7. RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

The researcher firstly sought for permission to conduct the study from the superintendent at Mushawevana Children's home in Marondera. She presented the Bindura University research letter, the proposal for the research and also outlined other reasons that had motivated her to choose Mushawevana as a case study. This prompted the superintendent to approve of the study and provided the researcher with contact details of the care leavers the researcher could engage for interviews. The researcher then engaged care leavers through phone calls and set up individual interviews with them. The researcher also engaged a social worker working for the Department of Social Development and managed to interview the social worker concerning experiences of young adult care leavers. The researcher then utilized data collected from the participants to develop themes and compose a well detailed report.

### **3.8. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY/ TRUSTWORTHINESS**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative research, the researcher utilized several strategies. Reliability and validity, as measures of trustworthiness in qualitative studies were addressed through the triangulation of data collection methods, including both key informant interviews and in-depth interviews with the care leavers themselves, to ensure the integrity of the findings. The detailed description of the methodology employed in the study further strengthened the reliability of the research. Additionally to enhance the transferability of the findings, the researcher made use of thick descriptions from the participants, providing rich details about the study setting, data collection processes and analysis.

#### **3.8.1 Ethical consideration**

According to Arifin (2018), research ethics are the principles and standards that guide the moral and legal conduct of a study, aimed at protecting the dignity and well-being of research participants. For this study, the researcher will adhere to several key ethical considerations. These will include ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, obtaining informed consent and safeguarding participants from any potential harm. The researcher will

uphold these ethical standards throughout the research process, in alignment with the established norms and guidelines that govern ethical research practices.

### **3.8.2 Voluntary participation**

According to Engel and Schutt the principle of voluntary participation is a fundamental ethical consideration in research, which ensures that human subjects have the right to freely decide whether or not to be part of the study. In this case the researcher upheld this principle, avoiding any form of coercion, in order to maintain the reliability and integrity of the research findings. Participants were not forced or pressured to take part in the study but rather were given the autonomy to make an informed and voluntary decision about their involvement.

### **3.8.3 Informed consent and confidentiality**

The researcher ensured the adherence to key ethical principles throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully apprised of the purpose of the research prior to their involvement. The researcher was transparent about the academic nature of the study, and made it clear that all information provided would be treated with strict confidentiality. This safeguarded the participants from exploitation and protected their privacy, aligning with the ethical standards that govern responsible research practices.

### **3.8.4 Neutrality**

The researcher maintained a neutral and objective approach throughout the research process. They respected the diverse perspectives of the respondents without attempting to alter their views. The researcher avoided being judgmental and kept their own opinions separate from their experiences shared by the respondents, ensuring that the data collected was free from bias.



### **3.9. DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH**

According to Sharma (2017), data analysis is the systematic process of examining, evaluating and structuring the various forms of data collected by the researcher to enhance understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the data was presented in a tabular format to ensure clarity and facilitate comprehensive analysis. The researcher followed the six step data analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarizing themselves with the data, generating initial descriptive codes, developing overarching themes, identifying connections between themes, refining and defining the themes and finally producing a detailed report. The researcher closely examined the experiences of the young adult care leavers after their discharge from the children's home, as described by Barbie (2018), to identify meaningful emerging themes throughout the data analysis process.

### **3.10. LIMITATIONS**

The study utilized qualitative research and used only 8 care leavers from the residential child care facility and 1 key informant. Due to the smaller sample size, not all experiences of care leavers would be captured.

### **3.11. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on research methodology by highlighting the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, research procedure, data analysis approach and limitations encountered.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.0. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the data analysis and discussion of the research findings, which incorporate information gathered from the care leavers as well as key informants. The study aimed to explore the narratives and lived experiences of care leavers after their discharge from Mushawevana Children's Home. The researcher employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyze the data, taking into account the emergent themes and subthemes derived from the participants' accounts as well as the perspectives provided by the key informants involved in the research.

### **4.1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

The researcher conducted interviews with eight care leavers who had been discharged from Mushawevana Children's Home, ranging in age from 18 to 30 years old. The researcher collected biographical information of the participants, including their age, sex, orphan status, educational background, employment status, marital status and length of stay in the institution. Additionally the researcher interviewed a key informant from the Department of Social Development, whose information was also gathered. This biographical data was crucial in establishing the trustworthiness, credibility, reliability and neutrality of the study findings. The biographical information for all participants is presented in a table, and will be further analysed and interpreted within the chapter.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Orphan status</b>	<b>Level of education</b>	<b>Length of stay in the institution</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
Care leaver 1	21	M	Unknown	Tertiary	14 years	Currently enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe
Care leaver 2	19	M	Double orphan	Secondary	8 years	Currently staying at the transitional house whilst looking for work
Care leaver 3	23	M	Double orphan	Secondary	15 years	Part time jobs and stays with a relative
Care leaver 4	26	M	Double orphan	Secondary	15 years	Working as a Waiter and staying with friends
Care leaver 5	30	F	Unknown	Secondary	10 years	Working as a professional hairdresser and is living independently
Care leaver 6	22	F	Single orphan	Secondary	8years	Cohabiting and is a housewife
Care leaver 7	19	F	Double orphan	Secondary	9 years	Re-writing failed O level subjects and staying with foster parents

Care leaver 8	20	F	Double orphan	Secondary	15 years	Working as a stay-in house maid
Key Informant 1	34	F		Tertiary		Qualified Social worker

## **4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.2.1 EXPERIENCES OF ADULT CARE LEAVERS AFTER DISCHARGE FROM RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES.**

Participants narrated the experiences they faced after discharge from residential child care facilities and also how these experiences were hindering them from making progress in life. These experiences were in relation to access to accommodation, employment, social support, social interactions, access to identification documents, education and training, and mental and physical health. This part also underlines challenges that care leavers face and their determination to make positive progress in their chosen path in work or education, and the support that they were able to secure.

#### **4.2.1.1 Challenges with finding accommodation**

The participants narrated that after discharge they had limited options for accommodation and had to take full advantage of those options. It is often easier for those who would have done well in their studies and manage to proceed to University, College or Vocational training as they get to stay at the university residence during the period of their learning. For those leading independent lives, they shared that depending on the income they usually rent out rooms as 2 or 3 friends to cut costs and also share costs to purchase groceries. Some of the male care leavers narrated that it was much easier for the female care leavers than males in terms of accommodation as they can easily look for work as stay-in housemaids or even get married and become house wives. One of the female participants noted that:

*After discharge I did not want to stay in the transitional housing and doing agriculture as it is the only program on offer there, the quality of life there is very different from the one we were used to at the Home. Due to the reasons I have stated I did not hesitate to elope to my boyfriend and begun staying with him. (Care leaver 6)*

Another care leaver mentioned:

*I opted to take a job as a stay-in maid just after being discharge to escape having to worry about accommodation challenges and ever since I have been moving from one job to another as a stay-in house maid. (Care leaver 8)*

Upon being interviewed one of the care leavers remarked:

*I find it easier to rent a room with three of my friends and we help each other to pay rent, of course the room is overcrowded but that is the only option available. (Care leaver 4)*

As evidenced from the above narratives by care leavers, finding new accommodation after being discharged is challenging for the young adults especially those without traceable relatives. This is the likelihood of elopement for the female care leavers who are often vulnerable to the advances of manipulative men. In light of this, it is of paramount importance to note that the gaps left in policy implementation towards young adults after discharge engender negative impacts. Some of the care leavers end up being victims of unfavorable circumstances like sharing a room with three other people. These findings concur with Messay (2019), who postulated that care leavers viewed the life in residential child care facilities as a luxury because everything was freely provided for them. The United Nations Guidelines for alternative care recommended support for young people to gain access to suitable accommodation but countries like Zimbabwe have not abided by these conditions. Messay and Tekele (2017), purport that accommodation is a challenge as some female care leavers were

forced into marriages of convenience and relationships just to secure accommodation. This reflects on gaps left in policy governing life of care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities.

#### **4.2.1.2 Employment**

During the interview sessions, participants established that they were facing employment challenges just like other youths in Zimbabwe who have not been in care due to the poor economy of the nation. Majority of the care leavers noted that it was mostly difficult for them to get employed as the job industry in Zimbabwe requires one to be well connected with people in positions of influence and this was difficult for them because when you are in care you are confined to that residential facility and fail to relate with the outside world and establish social links. Moreover considering that Marondera is a small town with Proton bakery as the only fully operational industry it is then difficult to get employed. This has a culmination of numerous social issues such as prostitution as well as the rise in suicidal cases due to hopelessness. Sebate (2014), notes that unemployment is associated with care leavers' steadiness and has a large bearing on social integration. The participants confessed that they took any jobs that they could find and often engaged in part time employment to make ends meet. The citations captured below testify the participants' views regarding finding employment after leaving care.

*At some pointing time I worked 3 months without getting my salary, the employer would claim that my salary amounted to the food I had burnt and the utensils I had broken, I could not leave until I had found another job so I just tolerated the abuse. I have been moving from one house to another because it is difficult to find employers that gives you a remuneration that matches work done. (Care leaver 8)*

*Finding employment in this difficult economy has become very stressful especially if one did not proceed to tertiary level. Most job adverts requires one to have at-least a National certificate, most of the discharged care leavers would have ended their educational journey at Ordinary level and the case is worse in a small town like Marondera where there are no viable industries. Care leavers that are currently financially stable and independent are those that managed to do practical courses and are self-employed, the rest provide cheap labor and it is quite unfortunate that most female care leavers resort to early marriages to escape financial responsibilities. (Key informant)*

*I survive on part time jobs, I stay with my grandmother and she is now very old so I have to man up but it is very tough. (Care leaver 3)*

The above narrations give a clear picture of how it is very difficult for care leavers to maneuver through the job market without social links. Many care leavers are discharged from residential care without having attained proper educational qualifications and depending on the child care facility those who fail their Ordinary level examinations are not presented with another opportunity to rewrite. This reveals that there is correlation between lack of education and unemployment. Poor educational qualifications has negatively impacted them as they cannot secure high paying jobs and some end up taking many manual jobs just to survive and the same time overstraining their body. Due to their vulnerability many of these care leavers face oppression and exploitation especially the females as they are usually underpaid and abused emotionally and in worst cases physically. Young adult care leavers also suffer discrimination in their job search and in work places as a result of their background and having the short bridged birth certificate which hinders them from participating in many activities. This is supported by Sebate (2014), who argues that there is a lot of discriminatory occurrences in employment circles towards care leavers. From the discussion it can be noted that lack of social skills, low educational attainment and discrimination in job searching negatively impact care

leavers and hinder them from attaining well-paying jobs. They often end up in unstable and low income jobs where they are victims of harsh working conditions and abuse.

#### **4.2.1.3 Social support**

Participants identified lack of adequate social support as one of the drivers of some of their negative outcomes. During the interviews half of the participants attested that they had not received adequate support upon being discharged. The participants noted that pre and post discharge counselling could have gone a long way in preparing them for independence but only pre-discharge counselling was provided to them by the location social worker and caregivers, the routine check-up and post-discharge counselling they were promised they never received. The care leavers further noted that they did not receive any discharge monetary packages that they could have used to start income generating projects but rather they had to become “instant adults”. Below are some of the accounts of the research participants:

*It was an overwhelming experience for as I was discharged and started staying with my grandmother, whom I had to look after. It was an overwhelming experience for me especially now that I did not have the safety net of the care system. (Care leaver 3)*

*The absence of a support network especially without traceable relatives makes the transition more difficult and isolative. It was challenging for me to find stable housing, securing employment and navigating the challenges of adult life without the support I had gotten used to receiving at the Home. (Care leaver 4)*

*My only pillar of support was my boyfriend who is my boyfriend. Shortly after being discharged I had to move in together with him as he was providing me with all the support I needed. (Care leaver 6)*



The above evidence from the research clearly shows that lack of adequate social support after discharge can be a driver of desperate measures by care leavers like cohabiting. It shows that for some care leavers they turned to their loved ones for social support as expressed by care leaver 6. Support should be provided for the care leavers before and after they are discharged until they are well integrated into the community or society so as to reduce vulnerability in them. Majority of the care leavers complained that they expected to receive much support from the Department of Social Development (DSD) and Ministry of Youth Affairs but nothing notable came from them as they reported that they did not have much resources

#### **4.2.1.4 Social interactions**

Participants identified social interactions as a driving force for their resilience after being discharged. During the interviews majority of the participants noted that social interactions with friends and even care givers during their stay in residential care facilities and after they were discharged motivated them to be more resilient in the face of challenges they experienced after being discharged. Majority of the participants confessed they had three or four close friends whom they hang out with oftenly and could rely on when they had difficulties. These friends would be from secondary school, some who would also have been in care and some from work. The participants further noted that building and maintaining good and stable interactions whilst still in care help to some extent in the integration process. Below are some of the accounts from the research participants:

*Even though it was a difficult experience transitioning out of care, the social interactions with friends and care givers motivated me to be resilient. Where I am in life now, I can attribute it to the strength I drew from social interactions after being discharged. (Care leaver 5)*

*I was fortunate enough to find good and supportive foster parents who took me under their care after being discharged. The foster parents have biological children who are around my*

*age and interacting with them help me to get insight on life outside of residential child care facilities. (Care leaver 7)*

*It was difficult at first to establish social circles like most of my peers. I only got to make meaningful and genuine connections after joining a WhatsApp group that had been created with other older care leavers from different towns cities, it became like a family with brothers and sisters. (Care leaver 4)*

The findings from the study shows that care leavers can draw their strength from social interactions and thereby becoming resilient. From the above narratives, the participants seemed to infer that social interactions with friends and care givers play a significant role in building resilience after they would have been discharged. According to Harker et al (2011), social support is an important protective factor that can help individuals cope with stress and adversity. Social interactions with care givers and friends can provide a sense of belonging, foster a sense of self efficacy and help to reduce the stigma associated with being a care leaver.

#### **4.2.1.5 Access to identification documents**

From the research, all of the participants interviewed highlighted that they had both the birth certificates and national identity card. The key informant who is a social worker highlighted that as a department concerned with the welfare of children, the DSD made tremendous efforts to ensure that all children they placed under care have birth certificates so that they could not be hindered from participating in extra-curricular activities at school. Marondera DSD particularly, took advantage of the mobile Civil Registry Services (mCRS), which is a system that allows the registration of births, marriages and deaths through the use of mobile devices. The participants applauded this and highlighted that since they had birth certificates it was much easier for them to access national identity card as only a referral from the residential child care facility was required. Below are some of the accounts from the research participants:

*As a social worker working for the DSD we always make sure that we facilitate for the birth certificates of those abandoned or neglected without the requisite document whilst they are still on place of safety. This also reduces stigma and discrimination for the children as especially at school as they will be able to participate in extra curricula activities just like other learners. (Key informant 1)*

*I was placed under care at a much older age but the social worker who placed me at that time started making arrangements for me to register for a birth certificate whilst I was staying with foster parents as they looked for a residential child care facility to place me. (Care leaver 7)*

*I was in the soccer team whilst in secondary school and because I had a birth certificate and national identification card I always traveled for sports tournaments at other schools. This made me to blend in well with other learners outside care. (Care leaver 1)*

The efforts made by the Department of Social Development to facilitate identification documents in time before discharge is a plausible milestone. This can be attributed to the improved birth registration systems that has been marked by technological advancements. From the above narratives it shows that social workers working for DSD Marondera has made huge improvements in ensuring that majority of the children have access to identification documents and this has a positive impact on them even after leaving care as it reduces identity crisis. According to Bhabha (2016), having identification documents can provide care leavers with a sense of identity and belonging, which can help them to feel more connected to their community and culture. Additionally, it makes it easier for care leavers to access services like health care.

#### **4.2.1.6 Education and training**

The participants revealed that due to different levels of academic excellence and diversity in life skills, more focus is mostly given to those who are academically gifted and pass their

examinations at first sitting. The residential child care facility mostly allocate their resources to those who pass and are eligible to proceed to university. Only one participant from the eight interviewed had managed to proceed to university, others had taken up short courses by themselves, got employed and for some they did not bother to make efforts to rewrite failed Ordinary level subjects. Young adult care leavers fail to get another opportunity to sit for two or more examinations after exceeding the stipulated age of institutionalization organized under the patronage of the Department of Social Development. Below are some of the narratives from the participants:

*The Department of Social Development is not mandated to provide assistance to young adult care leavers for them to further their education. The department can only make referrals and link care leavers to resources but it seems here in Marondera most people have felt the sting of the current economic decay. The few well-wishers who register with us are only willing to invest in those who are academically gifted. (Key informant 1)*

*I wrote my Ordinary level examinations at 18 and when results came out I had already been discharged. I had managed to pass only one subject and there has not been any plans for me to rewrite failed subjects. Efforts to find a job with only one subject has not been fruitful. (Care leaver 2)*

*I had to fund myself to do a short course in hairdressing after being discharged as I had attained three subjects at Ordinary level. That short course helped me very much as I am now a professional hairdresser. It is my wish that care leavers may get the funding to go for vocational training if they are not able to proceed to university as this can groom them into financially independent citizens. (Care leaver 5)*

It is quite evident from the participants' narratives that they are not given the opportunity to explore the potential and skills that they may possibly possess and this hinder them from

progressing well after being discharged. Failure to acquire technical skills is a menace to the adult care leavers particularly during this era. Attainment of technical skills can open many avenues for the care leavers in terms of employment and even self-employment. These findings align with the research conducted by Frimpong (2021) in Ghana, which examined care leavers' educational experiences and revealed factors that both promote and impede their educational attainment. Frimpong's study noted that many care leavers are discharged from residential child care facilities with limited or no qualifications and often fail to return to school to pursue their educational goals. Additionally, Vath and Blackery (2016) assert that factors such as resourcefulness, motivation and having supportive adults who provide guidance, encouragement and financial assistance can contribute to successful educational outcomes for care leavers. It is worth noting that the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) does not include any provisions for the extension of educational support to care leavers and can only make referrals to organizations and individuals who may be able to assist them in continuing their education. Consequently, the educational aspirations of many care leavers often remain unrealized, as there are few voluntary organizations that actively support young adults in pursuing their educational ambitions and these organizations tend to prioritize high-achieving individuals, a criterion that many care leavers may struggle to meet given their educational background.

#### **4.2.1.7 Mental and physical health**

The participants identified psychological distress just after being discharged which came with the reality that they were no longer recognized as children but adults. Majority of the participants however attested that this was just a temporary feeling which was quickly replaced by resilience and acceptance of reality. The participants confessed that except that psychological distress nothing had changed concerning access to medical assistance as they had their Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOs) renewed and they were now registered

for AMTOs for adults. Those who are now working and independent even confessed that they no longer had any need for the AMTOs.

*I never faced any psychological challenges after being discharged that could require the services of a professional medical practitioner. (Care leaver 3)*

*I still can use the AMTO to seek medical assistance but I have not used it ever since I was discharged, nothing much changed concerning that except the psychological stress I experienced just after being discharged but I am ok now I have accepted reality. (Care leaver 8)*

*My health is fine, what we need is financial assistance, stress is part of everyone's daily life. (Care leaver 4)*

The above evidence from the research clearly shows that care leavers have poor health seeking behaviors. This can be detrimental to their overall wellbeing as they bottle up emotional distress that then manifests as depression after some time. This concurs with a research led by Newman (2019), in which she found that many care leavers were not aware of the importance of looking after their physical and mental health. The study find out that whilst many care leavers felt positive about their physical health, only one in five said they were aware of the importance of taking care of their mental health. There is need for education to the young adult care leavers about the importance of improving their health seeking behavior and also ensuring that they have the necessary support to achieve this.

#### **4.2.2. COPING MECHANISMS OF CARE LEAVERS TO ADJUST TO COMMUNITY LIFE**

#### **4.2.2.1 Support from Government and residential child-care facility**

One of the participants noted that government through the Department of Social Development has been instrumental in ensuring that he proceeds to university. He mentioned that DSD mobilized funds for those who have attained good results at Advanced level so that they could proceed to university. Another participant echoed the same sentiments applauding DSD for securing good foster parents for her. A number of participants commended the residential child care facility for having a transitional home in which you are allowed to stay for a period of 1 year and only those with special needs would stay longer but this was also optional. Even the care leavers who had been discharged before this initiative was implemented commended the program saying it allowed care leavers to plan and seek opportunities before being completely on their own.

*The government through the Department of Social Development helped secure a sponsor who was willing to fund my education up to university and I am very grateful for that. (Care leaver 1)*

*I mostly commend the residential child care facility in which I grew in because of the efforts they have been putting to ensure we have a smooth transition to adulthood. (Care leaver 2)*

*There is a lot to be done for our children to pursue career opportunities after finishing primary and secondary school and with support from the government a substantive policy can be developed that ensures academic support is extended to children even after they would have been discharged from residential child care facilities. (Key informant)*

The participants' narratives clearly indicate that care leavers are not receiving the necessary support from the government after being discharged from residential care. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (2010), every child should have a comprehensive discharge plan that provides a range of services and support to facilitate continued education,

vocational training, employment, accommodation, independent living skills and access to social services and benefits. These provisions are outlined in Standard Six of the National Residential Child Care Standards and are meant to be arranged by the residential child care facility prior to a child's discharge. However, as highlighted by Wyatt, Mupedziswa and Rayment (2010), the effective operationalization of Standard Six may be challenging, as these institutions often face resource constraints. Notably, the majority of care leavers expressed a strong interest in pursuing vocational skills training and desired assistance with the associated costs.

#### **4.2.2.2 Self-reliance**

During the interviews participants established they took low paying manual jobs as they did not have the relevant qualifications or skills for well-paying jobs. Majority of the participants outlined self-reliance as a coping mechanism they had utilized to cope with the harsh realities of life. The citations captured below testify of the participants' views on self-reliance as a coping mechanism.

*I am surviving on a hand to mouth basis as I have a position of a waiter at a local restaurant. Though the remuneration is not enough, I can imagine to keep soul and flesh together. (Care leaver 4)*

*Since no one gives us pocket money, I take up piece jobs of gardening, doing laundry or hedge cutting so that I can have some money for airtime and other personal needs. (Care leaver 2)*

*After discharge I had to rely on my hairdressing skills to survive and now I am a professional hairdresser. (Care leaver 5)*

The findings from the study clearly indicates participants portray resilience through self-reliance as a coping strategy. Self-reliance enhance the belief in one's strength and ability to



deal with future challenges in life despite the hardships encountered in the past. These findings concur with Bloom (2013), who asserts that self-reliance is the greatest coping mechanism that an individual can cultivate to increase their ability to overcome adversity. In order to survive some care leavers are forced into marriages of convenience whilst for some their breakthroughs have been in social networks within their circles.

#### **4.2.2.3 Utilization of social skills**

From the research the participants highlighted that they also utilized social skills and they resources they mobilized on their own. Some care leavers attested that they join church youth groups and from there they get psychological and material support. One participant who now works as a professional hairdresser confessed that she had discovered her talent at church through a hair-styling contest held at church. From there, their youth leader vowed to provide funding so she could take up a course in hairdressing. Additionally, other participants noted that through their interactions with others in the community they are able to get piece jobs and survive. Below are some of the narratives from the participants:

*My greatest breakthrough has been from the youth group I joined and being discovered by my youth leader who then funded me to take up a hairdressing course. (Care leaver 5)*

*Through interacting well with my neighbors in the community, they refer me to people in need of assistance with domestic chores and there and from there I have a source of livelihood. (Care leaver 3)*

*My friends who were already employed at a local restaurant put in a good word for me when there was a vacancy and I also managed to secure a job there. (Care leaver 4)*

It is apparent from the above findings that most care leavers find solace in the utilization of social skills. These findings concur with Lombe (2014), who asserts that care leavers in

Zimbabwe often rely on their social skills to cope with the transition process. Some care leavers through the experiences of others they network with people of influence whilst in care so that when they are finally discharged those connections will work to their advantage. Some fight to be exceptional academically, in extra curricula activities, and even in their service at church. All these then work for their advantage once they would have been discharged.

#### **4.2.2.4 Family support**

Some of the participants highlighted that they had no traceable relatives and because of that they could not receive support from them. The key informant who is a social worker working at the DSD highlighted that most children who were placed at the Mushawevana home were cases of child abandonment with no traceable relatives. She noted that even after many years no relatives or parents would come forward looking for those children, therefore the circumstances of most children remain unchanged. Only 3 participants out of the 8 interviewed had traceable relatives but were incapacitated to provide much assistance. Only one participant was staying under the care of foster parents and commended them for the love and affection they were showing her. There are also support networks created by those who would have aged out of care many years back. In their capacity they help their fellow brothers and sisters navigate life after care. Below are some of the narratives from the participants:

*My father is still alive but he is too busy with his life to care about me. All he cares about is drowning himself in alcohol. My husband, however has been compensating for all these years I grew up without the presence of a father figure, he has become family and source of all the support I can ever need. (Care leaver 6)*

*I am a double orphan and now stay with elderly grandmother. The only closure I have is knowing my relatives but when it comes to support I am actually the one supporting her with the help of neighbors at times. (Care leaver 3)*

*My foster parents has been my greatest source of support. (Care leaver 7)*

The findings from the study clearly indicate family does not always mean those that a person is biologically related to. From the care leavers' narratives it shows that family can mean those people that care about their wellbeing and consistently show them support. In most cases these children are forced to become self-reliant at an early age because they have no one to look up to and they bond with their peers in similar situations.

#### **4.2.3 SUGGESTIONS BY CARE LEAVERS ON IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY**

The care leavers upon being interviewed made the following suggestions towards the improvement of service during their discharge from care so that they could have a smooth transition to adulthood.

##### **4.2.3.1 Financial support**

During the interview participants suggested that financial assistance was a much needed safety net to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood. Their argument was that the government should collaborate with other organizations and have a budget allocated for welfare of care leavers. Some of the care leavers argued that it was the responsibility of the residential child care facility they grew up in to assist its care leavers financially. They cited Children's villages like SOS that continue offering financial assistance to its care leavers long after they would have been discharged. They expressed that financial assistance would go a long way in covering rental, food and educational expenses. Below are some of the narratives from the care leavers:

*I feel it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that our needs are catered for even after discharge. The government through DSD should have a budget allocated to offer financial assistance to us even if they give us \$20 a month it would still help a lot. (Care leaver 3)*

*I wish I had been admitted at a home like SOS then I would still be receiving assistance even after discharge. It must be the responsibility of the residential child care facility to ensure that assistance is rendered to its care leavers until they become self-sustainable. (Care leaver 4)*

In agreement another care leaver echoed:

*This is the only home we have known, the only family we grew up to know, even in normal families children are not just send off to be independent adults without financial support from the parents. (Care leaver 8)*

It is clear from the above narratives that care leavers feel that their transition to adulthood would be easier if they are offered financial assistance. Financial assistance can be in form of cash transfers, vouchers and in-kind support. The assistance can go a long way and with it care leavers can even start small projects to sustain themselves whilst also being able to pay for rent, food and cover other expenses. This concurs with Ungar (2009), who argues that financial support is an essential part of a successful transition from care to independence. He argues that care leavers often face a number of challenges such as lack of stable housing, lack of financial resources and limited access to education and employment. Financial assistance help to ensure that care leavers have the resources they need to transition successfully into adulthood. There is therefore need for collaboration between residential child care facilities and the government to provide financial assistance to care leavers transitioning from care to independence.

#### **4.2.3.2 Follow up visits by residential child care facility and probation officer**

From the research participants highlighted the need for follow up visits by a social worker from the residential child care facility and a probation officer from DSD. The participants articulated that from these visits the social workers would be able to deduce if a transition was successful or not. The social workers would also map ways of intervening for the care leavers who needed support. All the participants agreed that follow up visits would ensure that interventions were

tailor-made to suit each care leaver's needs. Below are some of the narratives from the care leavers:

*It would help us very much if there were follow up visits from the residential child care facility and the probation officer. Even if the visit is just one after some months of being discharged, it would give us a platform for us to express our concerns to them. (Care leaver 8)*

Another participant in agreement added:

*Sometimes what we need is not even material resources but just that love and care of being followed up to check on our well-being goes a long way. (Care leaver 3)*

*The DSD is always complaining about lack of resources, but I feel that if they collaborate with the residential child care facility they can arrange for transport to carry out those follow up visits. (Care leaver 1)*

It is clear from the research findings that care leavers desire so much to be shown love, care and support through the follow-up visits. Follow up visits is a very important strategy and can also be a monitoring and evaluation tool to track progress of care leavers after they are discharged. As they evaluate how care leavers are integrating in the communities they can design interventions based on the needs of each care leaver. These follow up visits can reduce the prevalence of drug abuse among care leavers, cases of suicide and depression as there will be early interventions.

#### **4.2.3.3. Counselling and adequate preparation before discharge**

During the interviews participants highlighted the need for adequate pre and post discharge counselling. They expressed that since they had not had much exposure growing up they needed to have much preparation through numerous counselling sessions. They confessed that they had only received pre-discharge counselling sessions as groups and had not had time as

individuals which is crucial for their transitioning into adulthood. Majority of the participants expressed that there was need for post discharge counselling sessions with professional counsellors and social workers.

*I feel we should have received individual counselling sessions with the social worker so that we could freely express our fears and expectations of the new chapter we were starting. (Care leaver 3)*

*My foster parents are the ones who occasionally sit with me now and offer me counselling but it is good to listen to the voice of a professional from time to time. (Care leaver 4)*

*It would be better if they create a platform and inform us where we can continue to receive counselling so that I can even confide in them and ask advice regarding marriage and challenges it comes with since I have no living older sisters and aunts. (Care leaver 6)*

The sentiments expressed by the young adult care leavers aligns with many young adult care leavers who also relate that they did not receive adequate preparation for independent living. Studies have shown that discharge training and adequate counselling significantly reduce cases of suicide, drug abuse, marriages of conveniences among adolescents. According to a study conducted by Falconnier, Shleifer and Strona (2015), individuals who had received adequate counselling and preparation were less likely to engage in risky behavior, such as substance abuse, crime and high-risk sexual behavior. The study recommended that care leavers should receive at least six months of preparation and support before being discharged, including counseling, career planning and housing assistance. Girls who grow up without a father figure in their lives often fall prey to the advances of older men due to the desire to have that comfort, care and love that they could have been provided by their fathers. These relations often result in unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The prevalence of these

unfortunate circumstances can be reduced if there are follow up counselling sessions after discharge, specifically for the female care leavers.

#### **4.2.3.4 Vocational and life skills training**

Participants confessed that they expected to be offered vocational and life skills training before they were discharged. Upon being interviewed majority of the participants highlighted that there was need for vocational training for those who had not performed well in secondary school. They also expressed the need for the residential child care facility to offer some life skills in cooking, housekeeping and financial management so that they would self-sufficiency after discharge. Four of the care leavers made reference to the education 5.0 in Zimbabwe that promote the need for one to be equipped with practical skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce.

*I would do very well in Information Technology (IT) especially hardware engineering but I just need vocational training so that I become a professional. (Care leaver 3)*

*These days what one needs are those practical skills so that you can be self-employed and generate jobs for others. This also aligns with education 5.0 that has been implemented. (Care leaver 1)*

*With vocational training there would be no need for move from one employer to another looking for work as a maid. (Care leaver 8)*

From the interviews conducted with care leavers, it is time now for residential child care facilities need to take a step forward and implement this strategy. Vocational skills training help to equip care leavers with skills they can use as a way of generating income for themselves and contributing to the overall economic development of the nation instead of just being dependent. This idea is also supported by Worrell (2012), who purports that vocational training

programs can be an effective way to help young people who have been in care to transition into adulthood and the workforce. He argues that vocational training can provide these young people with the skills they need to be successful in the labor market, while also offering them the structure and support they may need to be successful in the transition to adulthood.

#### **4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter presented, analyzed and discussed the research findings in alignment with the study's objectives and research questions. The key themes identified from the data collected were presented, encompassing the experiences of the young adult care leavers, their coping mechanisms and their suggestions for improved service delivery. The research findings were discussed in the context of the relevant literature review and their theoretical framework underpinning the study. The next chapter will provide the overall conclusion, outline implications for social work practice and present the recommendations emerging from this research.



## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.0. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a detailed summary of the research findings of the study entitled, “experiences of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities, a case of Mushawevana in Marondera”. The objectives of the study were to explore socioeconomic experiences of care leavers, their coping strategies and their suggestions for improved service delivery. This chapter includes the conclusion and recommendations of the study, which have been influenced by the research findings.

### **5.1. SUMMARY**

The research sought to answer three research questions on the experiences of adult care leavers after they are discharged from residential child care facilities, their coping strategies after discharge and their suggestions on improved service delivery. The researcher will therefore provide a summary of research findings responding to the mentioned research questions.

### **5.2. SOCIOECONOMIC EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADULT CARE LEAVERS AFTER DISCHARGE FROM RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE FACILITIES**

#### **5.2.1. Accommodation**

The study established that care leavers experience accommodation challenges after they are discharged from residential child care facilities. Majority of the care leavers interviewed expressed that they had limited to no options of accommodation when they were discharged. This was mostly attributed to the absence of a transitional house for the older care leavers and a comprehensive discharge plan for each individual care leaver. Most of the care leavers interviewed are double orphans with no traceable relatives so they could not be discharged into the care of their relatives when they turned eighteen. Due to this experienced challenge, the

care leavers end up being victims of circumstances such as marriages of convenience, exploitation by employers and also resorting to staying in overcrowded environments.

### **5.2.2. Employment**

The study revealed that majority of the care leavers face challenges in terms of accessing well-paying jobs. Majority of the care leavers noted that it was mostly difficult for them to get employed as the job industry in Zimbabwe requires one to be well connected with people in positions of influence and this was difficult for them because when you are in care you are confined to that residential facility and fail to relate with the outside world and establish social links. This resulted in them lacking stability because they could not secure decent employment with job security. Findings also revealed that there was a correlation between education attainment and employment. Having low educational attainment resulted failing to find employment or securing low paying jobs.

### **5.2.3. Social support**

The study revealed that lack of adequate social support is one of the drivers of some of the care leavers' negative outcomes. From the study it is evident that pre and post discharge counselling can go a long way in preparing care leavers for independence. Post-discharge monetary packages for care leavers can help them to start income generating projects, pay for rent, purchase basic commodities and help them to further their education. The research also noted that lack of adequate social support after discharge can be a driver of desperate measures by care leavers like cohabiting and seeking for comfort and social support from wrong place. Support should be provided for the care leavers before and after they are discharged until they are well integrated into the community or society so as to reduce vulnerability in them.

#### **5.2.4. Social interactions**

The study also established that social interactions are a driving force for the resilience of care leavers after being discharged. Social interactions with friends and even care givers during their stay in residential care facilities and after they are discharged motivates them to be more resilient in the face of challenges they experience after being discharged. The study also revealed that building and maintaining good and stable interactions whilst still in care help to some extent in the integration process. The study highlighted that social interactions with care givers and friends provide a sense of belonging, foster a sense of self efficacy and help to reduce the stigma associated with being a care leaver.

#### **5.2.5. Access to identification documents**

The study also revealed through a key informant who is a social worker that as a department concerned with the welfare of children, the DSD has made tremendous efforts to ensure that all children they placed under care have birth certificates so that they could not be hindered from participating in extra-curricular activities at school. The study highlighted that care leavers are grateful to the DSD for this plausible milestone. This can be attributed to the improved birth registration systems that has been marked by technological advancements. The study highlights that having access to identification documents has a positive impact on care leavers as it reduces identity crisis. Additionally, it makes it easier for care leavers to access services like health care, employment and education.

#### **5.2.6. Education and training**

The study revealed that priority was mostly given to those who are academically gifted and pass their examinations at first sitting. It also revealed that most care leavers fail to further their education due to being discharged before completion of school, and also failure to raise tuition fees after being discharged. Additionally, research findings revealed the eagerness in the care leavers to take up vocational skills training so that they would use the skills they acquire to

earn a living. The study revealed that low educational attainment resulted in the care leavers performing low paying jobs in order to survive.

#### **5.2.7. Mental and physical health**

The study revealed that most care leavers experience psychological distress just after being discharged. The study revealed that most care leavers have poor health seeking behavior. The study also revealed that care leavers continue to use Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOs) to seek medical assistance after discharge as they are renewed registered for AMTOs for adults. Those who are now working and independent even confessed that they no longer had any need for the AMTOs.

### **5.3. COPING MECHANISMS ADOPTED BY CARE LEAVERS TO ADJUST TO COMMUNITY LIFE**

#### **5.3.1. Support from Government and residential child-care facility**

The study revealed that DSD mobilize funds for those who would have attained good grades at Advanced level so that they could proceed to university. Study findings also show that DSD secures foster parents for those about to be discharged from care but that mostly depends on the availability of willing foster parents. Study findings also revealed that the residential child care facility had established a transitional home where care leavers are allowed to stay for a period of 1 year and only those with special needs would stay longer but this was also optional. Care leavers that were discharged before this initiative was implemented commended the program and expressed that it allowed care leavers to plan and seek opportunities before being completely on their own. The findings also revealed that some of the care leavers relied on the community for support. It is a result of the collective efforts of the government, residential child care institutions and the community that the care leavers are able to cope.

### **5.3.2. Self-reliance**

Study revealed that those who were living independently had resorted to becoming self-reliant. Study reveals that many care leavers resort to low paying manual jobs as they did not have the relevant qualifications or skills for well-paying jobs. Study also shows that self-reliance among care leavers is a coping mechanism they utilized to cope with the harsh realities of life.

### **5.3.3. Utilization of social skills**

Study findings show that care leavers utilize their social skills and the resources they mobilize on their own. The study revealed that some care leavers join church youth groups and from there they get psychological and material support. The study also revealed that care leavers through their interactions with others in the community they are able to get piece jobs and survive.

### **5.3.3. Family support**

Study revealed that majority of the care leavers had no traceable relatives and because of that they could not receive support from them. Study findings also highlighted that most children who were placed at the Mushawevana home were survivors of child abandonment with no traceable relatives. The study also revealed that there are support networks created by those who would have aged out of care years back. In their capacity they help their fellow brothers and sisters navigate life after care.

## **5.4. SUGGESTIONS BY CARE LEAVERS ON IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY**

The study revealed a host of strategies which can be used to improve service delivery as recommended by the care leavers. One of these is financial assistance which they listed as a much needed safety net to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood. Their argument was that the government should collaborate with other organizations and have a budget allocated for welfare of care leavers. Secondly the care leavers highlighted the need for follow up visits by

a social worker from the residential child care facility and a probation officer from DSD. The participants articulated that from these visits the social workers would be able to deduce if a transition was successful or not. Additionally, the care leavers highlighted the need for adequate pre and post discharge counselling. They expressed that since they had not had much exposure growing up they needed to have much preparation through numerous counselling sessions. Lastly, care leavers suggested that they be offered vocational and life skills training before they were discharged. Majority of the participants highlighted that there was need for vocational training for those who had not performed well in secondary school.

## **5.5. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the analysis and discussion of the research findings, the study has drawn the following key conclusions. The first objective of the research was to explore the diverse experiences of care leavers after being discharged from residential child care facilities. The interviews with the care leavers revealed that more need to be done by the child care institutions and the government to ensure a smooth transition for these young adults. It is crucial that there is adequate preparation of care leavers before discharge, equipping them with essential life skills and vocational training to better facilitate their adjustment to community life. The effects of “aging out” of the care system have a significant impact on the outcomes of care leavers. Building on these insights, it is fundamental to develop personalized discharge care plans that can effectively address the unique challenges faced by each care leaver. Implementing these measures can contribute to more positive outcomes for young people transitioning out of residential child care facilities.

## **5.6. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK**

As indicated by the International Federation of Social Work (2014), social work is an art, a science and a discipline which applies scientific knowledge and professional judgment based on a code of ethics to intervene on behalf of individuals, families and groups to enhance or

restore their social functioning and create societal conditions favorable to their goals. Guided by the above definition it is clear that the experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms of care leavers lie within the scope of social work profession. Care leavers face different experiences that include, lack of social support, challenges when finding employment and accommodation and also proceeding with education. Social workers need to understand the unique experiences of care leavers and develop individual care plans with interventions and support systems that meet the care leavers' needs. The study findings also have an influence on social work skills and competences. The study revealed that some experiences of care leavers are a result of inaccessibility and also availability of services. In such cases it is imperative for social workers to possess the skills of networking, resource mobilization, coordination and research. This will enable the social workers to address the specific needs of each care leaver. Additionally, social work as a discipline entails that social workers design a comprehensive model to address the specific challenges faced by care leavers. Furthermore, failure to adequately attend to the care leavers' psychosocial needs has likelihood of exacerbating cases of suicide, mental health problems and disorders such as stress, depression and challenges to integrate well in the community.

## **5.7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.7.1. Policy recommendations**

- The Department of Social Development should partner with foster parents and strengthen the school holiday placement program of children in care so that they integrate in the community long before they are discharged from care.
- The Department of Social Development should partner with residential child care facilities and also engage the care leavers network so as to establish a comprehensive policy that address different challenges faced by care leavers after discharge.

- There should be active participation of care leavers and children still in care in developing their care plans and discharge plans.

### **5.7.2 Stakeholders/partners based recommendations**

- Partnership of government and non-governmental organizations to prioritize care leavers who would have failed their Ordinary level by ensuring they take up courses in vocational life skills training. The government however should take an active role and mobilize funding from local donors instead of only depending on international donors.
- Donors can work with local communities and the care leavers and help them to start income generating projects so that they can be self-sustainable.

### **5.7.3 Community/research participants based recommendations**

- Communities should create safe and welcoming environments for the care leavers that are free of stigmatization so as to enhance their experiences.
- Care leavers should set up a Care Leavers Network with a board of representatives in every town or city and advocate for reforms in policy that address their welfare.

### **5.7.4 Social work based recommendations**

- Social workers should contribute to research on the development of a comprehensive policy that address the welfare of care leavers after discharge.
- Social workers should partner with the Care Leavers Network and advocate for the recognition of care leavers as a group of people in need of interventions that address their diverse experiences.
- The psychosocial needs of care leavers require social workers to develop psychosocial support interventions.
- Social workers should work with the care leavers themselves and advocate

### **5.7.5 Focus for future study**



- There is need to explore the experiences of female care leavers, the disabled and the lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and queer people (LGBTQ) as independent groups.
- A multi case sampling design maybe explored to compare findings between different case studies to determine how geographical and demographic characteristics can have an influence on the experiences of care leavers.

## **5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter gave the overall portrait of the research by focusing on giving the summary, conclusion, recommendations and the area of future study.

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## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH FOR KEY INFORMANTS AND CARE LEAVERS

Narratives of care leavers on their socioeconomic experiences after discharge from residential child care facilities

### APPENDIX 1 Consent Form

I,.....hereby consent to participate in this research study. The purpose of this investigation has been highlighted to me. I do understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point or refuse to answer questions without any consequences. I understand that confidentiality will be maintained and my identity will remain anonymous when the findings are presented. I also consent to tape recording of the research interview.

Signature of Participant.....

Date.....

Name of Researcher.....

Signature.....

Date.....

## **APPENDIX 2 In depth interview guide for Care leavers**

### **Section A: Demographic characteristics**

1. Gender of participant. *M.*[ ] *F*[ ]
2. Age of participant. [       ]
3. Orphan Status. *Single orphan* [ ] *Double orphan* [ ]
4. Level of education. *Primary* [ ] *Secondary* [ ] *Tertiary* [ ]
5. Employment status. *Employed* [ ] *Unemployed* [ ]
6. Marital Status. *Single* [ ] *Married* [ ] *Divorced* [ ]
7. Length of stay in the institution. [       ]

### **Section B**

- 1. Exploring the socioeconomic experiences of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities.**

#### **Sub-sections**

- 1a.**What has been your experiences like in relation to finding employment, housing, access to identification documents, stigma and discrimination after leaving care?
- b.** What resources and support did you have to help you transition to independence?

- c. What kind of relationships have you had with family and friends since leaving care?
- d. How has been your mental and physical health since leaving care?
- e. What was your educational experience like whilst in care and how is it now after leaving care?

### **Section C**

#### **2. What are the coping strategies of young adult care leavers after leaving care?**

##### **Sub questions**

- 2a. What support systems have been extended to you to help with the transitioning process?
- b. Which of the strategies have been the most effective for you?
- c. What strategies have you utilized to survive since discharge from care?

### **Section D**

#### **3. Strategies to improve the welfare of young adult care leavers after discharge from residential child care facilities.**

##### **Sub questions**

- a. What do you think should be done to improve the welfare of care leavers after discharge in terms of financial and social support?

*Thank you for your participation*

### APPENDIX 3 Key informant interview guide.

## Section A: Demographic characteristics

1. Gender of participant [ ]
2. Age of participant [ ]
3. Highest educational qualification attained [ ]

## Section B

1. What are some of the challenges you have seen young people experiencing in the transition to independent life?
2. In your perception what are the most important factors to consider in ensuring successful transitioning to independent life?
3. What measures do you think government should put in place to ensure that care leavers' reintegration is achievable?
4. What support systems and services are in place from the government and residential child care facilities to ensure that care leavers' transition from residential care is successful?
5. What are some of the coping mechanisms being utilized by care leavers to survive in society after leaving care?
6. Can you comment on the existing legislative laws and policies on the reintegration of care leavers in the communities in Zimbabwe?



7. Have you identified any gaps in policies in Zimbabwe with regards to care leavers.

