

Care to Work Pathways Study

Care leavers' experiences in the world of work:
an international study

Briefing for Potential Collaborators

Coordinators

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Research context

The 'Care to Work Pathways Study' is an international research project that seeks to investigate the work – related experiences of young people in care and care leavers. The Study proceeds from the premise that work and employment are key parts of social inclusion for care leavers. It is also influenced by the challenges that care leavers may face due to structural factors such as high rates of youth unemployment (Courtney, 2009).

The project operates on the model of national Case studies combined with comparative reviews of evidence from these national Cases.

The initial work of the Study, which started in 2013, was based on research in Ireland and Catalonia, under the direction of the Study founders and co-principal investigators Prof. Robbie Gilligan and Dr. Laura Arnau.

The success of the initial collaboration, the insights derived from its comparative dimension, and the interest it has generated has led to establishing a framework for a broader study.

We believe that evidence from a range of national systems that are reported separately and also reviewed in comparative perspective can offer valuable insights on sources of support or difficulty that young people have encountered on their journey into and through the world of work. These should include attention to the role if any of both formal and informal sources of support, including support from carers.

Background to Study

Research shows that leaving care, for many young people in care, can be a complex process. Employment is crucial to social inclusion and integration, and is also a critical dimension of the transition process to adulthood, especially for young care leavers as for other vulnerable populations. There is also evidence that work is associated with stability and social integration for young people who have left care. Early part time work experience may also serve as an important 'launching pad' for later jobs (Hook and Courtney, 2011; Stewart, Kumb, Barth and Duncana, 2014)

However, unemployment rates in many countries reflect the difficulties faced by young people in accessing and progressing into and within the world of work in a period of economic recession and austerity. In the case of care leavers, evidence suggests that they are more likely to experience less employment and lower earnings compared to their peers not in care (Stewart et al., 2014). Focusing on care leavers currently working can help us to understand better what has helped these young people find and stay in jobs, and may have relevance for policy and practice relating to care leavers. It is important to learn from successful trajectories and good outcomes.

Key Features of the study

- Study of care leavers and work issues
- Study of care leavers in mid to late twenties and currently employed
- Studies in relation to different care systems (Ireland, Catalonia to date) – and planning in progress for a number of other countries
- Focus on work histories / trajectories/transitions since leaving care
- Focus on experiences / influences in the world of work
- Focus on success- inquiry through the lens of learning from positive stories
- Cross national studies building from national case studies
- Qualitative approach

‘Success’ in the world of work is not defined in this Project as earning large income from work, or being CEO or building up a large company. ‘Success’ is seen more as: work stability, work satisfaction, or a strong foothold in the world of work.

Aims and research questions

This study looks at influences on care leavers’ entry into and progress in the world of work since they left care until the time of interview

The study helps to highlight potential key ingredients or elements in stories of success in study participants’ entry into and progress in the world of work.

Aims:

1. To analyze care leavers’ varied experiences of progress into employment in their time since leaving care.
2. To identify factors (including care history) that may influence their work experiences in the labour market
3. To analyze how employment history contributes to their well-being in their transition process to adulthood
4. To describe what actions by others they have found supportive in their entry into and continued engagement in the world of work

Research questions:

1. What are the experiences of progress in care leaver’s work trajectories since leaving care? Where are they now in the world of work?
2. What do these care leavers see as having influenced their progress in their employment trajectories/work transitions?
3. How does their employment history, in their view, contribute to their well-being in their transition process to adulthood?

4. What support do these care leavers report as having been provided in terms of promoting their engagement in work - both formal (programmes, services...etc) and informal (help from friends / carers etc) - for young people leaving care in the relevant participating jurisdiction (Ireland, Catalonia, etc.)?

Design of the study

A multiple case study approach is used for national Case Studies. Within these larger Case Studies, the overall set of individual cases in each sample is based as far as possible on maximum -variation sampling (gender, type of placement, countries, education / work history, etc). This multiple maximum variation Case Study and cross national design is seen as strengthening the value of findings where convergent (or divergent) findings emerge across cases within and between participating jurisdictions.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with each participant exploring work trajectories since first job and what in their view has affected these work trajectories since leaving care.

The main research design features are summarized below:

- Cross-national study: Ireland, Catalonia, and other participating countries (Sweden, Belgium, Czech Republic, and Canada)
- Qualitative approach.
- A maximum -variation sampling approach.
- Semi-Structured “biographically informed” interviews.

Recruitment process: Selection criteria and procedures

Participants are selected on the basis of three criteria:

- Have extensive care experience (foster care and / or residential care).
- Have left care at least 5 years ago.
- Are currently working or with substantial employment experience since leaving care.

Conduct of Interviews

A qualitative interviewing approach was used to interview participants. It should of course be borne in mind that a flexible approach is necessary– since topics will surface out of sequence, etc. (see appendix 1)

All of the interviews were conducted in person and took approximately one hour and a half. They were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of the interview.

Data analysis

In order to analyze data, a conventional content analysis was conducted in the original study (Ireland-Catalonia) using coding categories derived directly from the text data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

A random sample of interviews was selected to generate an agreed set of codes and categories by the two principal investigators. Once the researchers found consistency in the coding, the rest of the interviews were categorized and analyzed.

Data was analyzed using a descriptive analysis matrix based on the codes.

Invitation to researchers

We are interested in hearing from researchers who may wish to join the project as full collaborators who contribute data to the overall cross national dataset. Full collaborators would do this by full replication of the study in their own country. In order to ensure full compatibility of procedures and data, there would be close liaison with the overall project coordinators. Sharing data gathered fully in accord with the principles of the study would entitle the researcher to full participation in analysis, drafting and co-authorship of papers drawing on the dataset that includes their contribution.

Necessary conditions for full collaboration in replication studies

Ethical approval for proposed national case study secured (see below)

The first two national Case Studies in the Project secured ethical approval from the Research Ethics Approval Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, with the support of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. New collaborators, who wish to replicate the full study in their national context must commit to getting ethical approval from the research ethics committee of their university or relevant local agency.

A local advisory group is convened

A small reference group consisting of 4 stakeholders for each participating country should be involved throughout the research process.

At least, two meetings would normally be held, one at the beginning and another before the study is concluded, in order to help in the planning, to comment on the research design and process, and to validate the interview.

Commitment to publication of national report in relevant peer – reviewed journal.

Commitment to sharing data for pooled data set for aggregate cross national analysis (see Arnau-Sabatés & Gilligan, 2015) and co-authorship of resulting work, with full participation in preparation of relevant publications drawing on collaborator's data

Commitment to assisting in the promotion and further development of the overall study

Funding

Since there is no central fund for the overall Project, it is hoped that national or sub-national case studies can be conducted with local resources available to the relevant researcher or research team. It is also hoped that the preparation of cross national analyses can be conducted within already available resources (time of researchers). While cross – national communication will largely occur electronically, it is hoped that there may be occasional opportunities for researchers to meet in person linked to relevant conferences, etc. The research group (Originators and case study collaborators) may also seek specific funding opportunities to support such meetings or the wider research work of the group.

Publications derived

Arnau-Sabatés, L., & Gilligan, R. (2015). What helps young care leavers to enter the world of work? Possible lessons learned from an exploratory study in Ireland and Catalonia. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 53, 185–191. DOI:10.1016/j.chilyouth.2015.03.027

Gilligan, R., & Arnau-Sabatés, L. (2017). The role of carers in supporting the progress of care leavers in the world of work. *Child and Family Social Work*, 22(2), 792-800. DOI: 10.1111/cfs.12297

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- Courtney, M. (2009). The Difficult Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth in the US: Implications for the State as Corporate Parent. *Social Policy Report*, 23(1), 3-18.
- Hsieh, H.F. & Shannon, S.E. (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-88.
- Hook, J. L., & Courtney, M. E. (2011). Employment outcomes of former foster youth as young adults: The importance of human, personal, and social capital. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(10), 1855-1865.
- Stewart, C.J., Kumb, H.C., Barth, R.P and Duncana, D. F. (2014). Former foster youth: Employment outcomes up to age 30. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 36, 220–229

Appendix 1

Interview topic guide

GENERAL TOPICS (not necessarily discussed in this order)	OPENING QUESTIONS
current job and how they got it	Tell me what your current work situation is... <i>(What are the job conditions: salary, contract...etc? What do you think helped you in seeking and getting this job? Did anyone help you in finding out about it or applying for it?...etc)</i>
overall work experience since first job, including gaps	Tell me about your overall work experience ... <i>(What was the first time you had your first work experience (including part time work)? Tell me about this job... After your first work experience in the labour market, which was your next job? Tell me about this job... Was it hard to get these jobs? Did you spend a lot of time between jobs?)</i>
work experiences before leaving care (if any)	Did you have any previous work experience before leaving care (such as voluntary work?) <i>If so, Tell me about this experience...</i> Why did you start working? How did you enter the world of work? Was there anybody that helped you get a job? Were you in school at that time?
learning about and getting or keeping these different jobs	Help me to understand how you get these jobs... <i>(What and who helped you in seeking, getting and keeping them?)</i>
overall experiences of work life - good and bad	How were your experiences throughout your work life? <i>(Which is your fondest memory? And any bad memories?)</i> 1.Which factors helped more to progress within the labour market if there are any? Do you think your studies help you in your entry to work and progress into world of work? 2.which work experiences have been most influential in your work /personal life? Form which one has you learn the most?
has care history impacted work life in any way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impact of leaving care on work life • (ex-) care status and work life - do colleagues and employers know etc 	Do you think that the fact you were in care hashad any influence throughout your work life? <i>If so, Could you explain it?</i>
Relations with work colleagues or	Tell me about how were your relationship with

employers - good and bad parts	your boss, colleagues...etc at work <i>(Did you meet any other people that help you? Did you make a lot of friends at work? How would you describe this relationship now? Do you things together with people from work in your free time – what kind of things and how often)</i>
Socializing at work (holidays, going out, leisure time...etc.)	
Has work helped them in their wellbeing	Help me to understand the positive things that being in work and life at work gives you Help me to understand what work brings into their life? Has work experience taught you any lessons for life? (Positive things that being in work gave you)
Has work harmed them in their wellbeing	Has being in work and life at work harmed you in your wellbeing? Any negative things?
What advice to other care leavers about work life.	If you were speaking to a young person who is in care now, what advice would you offer them about getting on in the world of work?