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UCC
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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

A Qualitative Study Exploring the Transition of Aged-Out Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) from Foster Care into Direct Provision (DP)

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CARL Research Project in Collaboration with Nasc



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CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

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Glossary of Terms

CARL	Community Academic Research Links
CBPR	Community-based participatory research
DP	Direct Provision
IASW	Irish Association of Social Workers
NASC	The Irish Immigrant Support Centre
ORAC	Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
SREC	Social Research Ethics Committee
SWTSCSA	Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum
TUSLA	The Child and Family Agency
UAM	Unaccompanied Minor
UCC	University College Cork
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

Abstract

This is a small-scale study examining the experiences of Aged-Out UAMs who transition from foster care into DP. The research was conducted in collaboration with The Irish Immigrant Support Centre (Nasc) through the CARL initiative.

Research methods included an extensive literature review and primary research in the form of qualitative semi-structured interviews. Through the process of semi-structured interviews the focus was on exploring meaning and further investigating whether institutions, policy and practice are meeting the needs of UAMs during this transitory period of their lives. The study uses a method of purposive sampling to identify participants who met the specific criteria requirements. Ethical approval was received from the UCC SREC board in order to carry out this study.

The findings illustrate both benefits and difficulties involved in using foster care for support UAMs, noting that it is not only the type of care that is important but the standard of care within that environment. As documented in other research, the author noted existence of resilience among those interviewed. However, this study further illustrated how systemic issues can exasperate vulnerabilities. Additionally, the quality of the relationships formed during this transitory period was a key influencer on the respondents overall experience.

Recommendations included the proposal for the government to fund a safeguarding strategy which sets out clear aims and guidelines to meet the complex and variable needs of UAMs. The need to enact the Aftercare Bill was also noted. The author proposed the requirement for foster carers to receive specialist training to provide care in this area. There was a further suggestion made for SWTSCSA to expand its Dublin base and offer a nationwide service. An overarching theme treaded through this study was the necessity for professionals to foster therapeutic, trusting relationships where there is a focus on practically supporting UAMS whilst also promoting agency.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those that took part in this project. Thank you for your time, your openness and your honesty. Through listening to your stories I have learnt a great deal more than I could have achieved reading countless books and journal articles on this particular subject matter. I hope that in my writing that I managed to capture the essence of your story. Also, thank you to the team at Nasc from being open to the idea of collaborating with me, and for their work in identifying participants for this study. I hope that in some way this study may be useful in your campaign for progressive change.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my tutor Caroline Shore who supported me throughout two placements and the beginning stages of my dissertation. Through both your guidance and observing your commitment to honouring the anti-oppressive principles of this profession, I have become clearer in regards the kind of social worker I want develop into and the values I want to uphold. Additionally, I want to thank my dissertation supervisor Pearl Doyle for her guidance, kindness and encouragement throughout this process. I am also very grateful to the wider MSW facility who I always found to be extremely generous with their time and knowledge. Overall I have found the last two years to be a great time of growth, both at an academic and personal level, and I maintain that the commitment of staff to instil the values pertaining to social work onto students has played a big part in this growth. And thus in leaving, I reflect back on the last two years very positively, and I look to the future with much optimism.

It is also important to acknowledge my MSW classmates, thank you for all your support and it has been a real joy getting to know everyone during the last two years.

Finally, I must recognise my family, my sangha and my friends for bringing lightness and joy to my life during all the trials and tribulations that go along with the process of completing the Masters Programme.

Respondent 2

“This is one thing that I always want to say to the Government. You know—I’m still young, like. I have no family, I have no one, do you know what I mean…I have a lot of potential. Maybe I have hopes, you know, maybe have dreams…Don’t kill them, man. .. Support me, you know. Just let me be useful to the country”

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Chapter One: Introduction and Background

1.1 Title

"A qualitative study exploring the transition of aged out unaccompanied minors (UAMs) from foster care into Direct Provision (DP)"

1.2 Introduction to the Study

This chapter offers an introduction and background to this study. The rationale behind the study is discussed as is the research aims and objectives. It further introduces the theoretical perspective informing the study. The researcher's reflexive positioning is discussed, and a brief outline of the coming chapters is set out.

1.3 Background

UAM are defined by the UNHCR as "a person who is under the age of eighteen…and who is separated from both parents and is not being cared for…by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so" (1994, p. 121). In the Irish context, from the late 1990's emerged a significant rise in the number of UAMs arriving in Ireland. The Irish state's response was to provide emergency care in the form of unsupervised hostels provision up until 2010 (Horgan, 2017; Sirriyeh, 2018). Notably, such facilities were not registered children's facilities, and although project workers and social workers visited, the general staff had no specific qualifications in the area of social care (Horgan, O'Riordan, Christie, & Martin, 2012). Notwithstanding, this came to generate much criticism (Arnold, 2011; Ombudsman for Children, 2006), and changes were made accordingly to place UAMs in approved residential centres on arrival before being transferred to foster care or supported accommodation (Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh, 2018).

However, on turning 18 UAMs are usually placed within the DP system; a system whereby basic needs of food and shelter for asylum seekers are met along with a small weekly allowance within an institutional environment. This process implies that an aged out UAMs status as an adult asylum seeker takes precedence over their status as a care leaver (Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh, 2018). Notably, DP has been the topic of much heated debate since its inception in 2001, and has been argued as a system which generates poverty and encourages exclusion among migrants (Arnold and Sarsfield Collins, 2011). While there has been recent improvements to the DP system such as an increase in the weekly allowance and cooking facilities, continued lack of access to employment and third level education give rise to ongoing concern. In the context of aging out UAMs transitioning into

an institutional setting, this has been linked to reduced independency and at life stage were most emerging adults are beginning to experience an increased sense in autonomy and self-determination. Interestingly, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton (2017) argue 'political suspicion' to be an factor influencing the poor practice that exists in relation to the aftercare supports offered to aged out UAM's, further noting that this may act as a deterrent to potential newcomers.

1.4 Research Rationale

This dissertation central aim is to ascertain how policy and practices impact the lived experiences of UAMs who seek asylum in Ireland. In an effort to refine the topic the author scoped out existing literature and further approached a number of agencies including Nasc-The Irish Immigrant Support Centre to identify areas within this broad domain where there was ambiguity, gaps in the literature and unanswered questions. In particular, Nasc is an agency which works to inform migrants and ethnic minorities to their rights and campaign for change in order to create a more just, inclusive and equal society. From here, the author had a number of discussions with both her Supervisor and the Campaigns and Communications Manager at Nasc. This resulted in questions being raised in relation to how UAMs experience the transitionary period from foster care and DP. In particular, questions arose as to the level of social work involvement and legal advice received during this period of time. This in turn, provided rationale for carrying out research in conjunction with the CARL initiative at UCC and Nasc.

Notably in relation to most CARL projects it is a community group who approaches the University proposing a research question derived from their day-to-day practice, often with an end goal of some form of social action. However, in the author's case she made contact with Nasc to discuss the possibility of carry out research for their agency. This illustrates the author's motivation to carry out research concerning principles of human rights, social justice and equality that surround immigration in Ireland.

In relation to the authors own professional development, this dissertation will be my last submission as a student before hopefully going on to receive a formal qualification in social work. I hope that it will help me embark on my career as a social worker steadfast in my commitment to advocacy and the pursuit for positive social change.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The objective of this study is to elicit the views of UAMs in an effort to explore their unique interpretations of what it was like to transition through the care system and into DP. It is also intended that through the process of capturing meaning systemic issues pertaining to this

area will also emerge. The aims and objectives of this study will be pursued through the following research questions:

1. Can you describe your experience of the foster care system and what it was like to anticipate the transition from the care system into DP on approaching 18? What feelings did it engender? Did it impact on any other areas of the young person's life?
2. What was the experience of transitioning into DP like from the perspective of the young person?
3. Are there any services and supports that these aged out UAM feel would have assisted them in the transition into adulthood?

1.6 Methodology

It is anticipated that a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews was most suitable in realising the aims and objectives. Additionally, considering that the study has a dual aim – firstly to interpret meaning and secondly to recognise systemic/structural issues it was decided that a mixed methodology would best suit. In particular, it will draw on an interpretivist theoretical perspective whereby the participant is invited to discuss the meaning they associate with the process of transitioning out of foster care and into DP.

However, a number of questions posed in the interview are intended to identify systemic issues and how this impacts on the lives of UAM's who transition into DP, thus, this study also blends in a critical theoretical stance to further challenge inequalities and human rights issues that exist in relation to UAM. Moreover, this process brings the marginalised into the debate which fits well with the anti-oppressive principles associated with social work (Note: a list of interview question is located in Appendix 3)

The author recognises that scope of questions and objectives appear broad for a small scale study, however, in considering the sparse research available within this area the rationale behind this format is to pick up on prevalent themes that need to be explored in more detail. It was further anticipated that this could be carried out by either by a future MSW student or by the author.

1.7 Reflexive Positioning

Effectively, I recognise that I am looking in on a world that I have no direct experience of living in, thus, there is a need to recognise my own positionality throughout. For such reasons, I kept a reflective journey throughout the research process to explore how my curiosity, privilege and conceptual lens influenced how data was gathered and interpreted. In this regard, I was able to recognise that I too am a 'research instrument' and creator of

'second-order stories' (Sword, 1999, p.277). Indeed, locating the 'self' within the research process enables deeper personal scrutiny to occur. This is a fundamentally process in recognising how the researcher is enmeshed in the research. While 'no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher' (Sword, 1999, p. 277), it is hoped that by deploying self-reflective and reflexive strategies that the legitimacy of the findings may be increased.

1.8 Chapter Outline

Chapter One

Chapter One introduces the title and background to the development of this study. It has detailed the rationale motivating this research. The research questions in which the aims and objectives of this study will be pursued where clearly outlined. Additionally, the logistics informing the methodological standpoint guiding the research was provided. Key terms were also explained within the text.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two introduces secondary research in the form of a literature review. It explores the policy and law pertaining to the topic and further acknowledges the competing discourses in the area. It also identify gaps in the literature which leave a number of questions unanswered.

Chapter Three

This chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings of the research. It focuses on the design of the study outlining the chosen methodology used to collect data for the research. It provides a justification for the methods used, exploring the benefits and challenges of using such an approach. The chapter concludes by addressing the key ethical considerations of this research.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents the findings and offers a qualitative analysis of the data collected

Chapter Five

The final chapter draws an overall conclusion based on the preceding chapters, and in turn, puts forward a number of recommendations in regards policy and practice. It further considers the implications of this study on social work practice going forward. This chapter concludes with a reflective piece on the research process

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overall introduction to the study, including title, background and rationale. It further explored the aims, objectives and research questions informing the study. It has explained the researcher's reflexivity positioning and provided a concise outline of each of the coming chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The secondary data for this study comprises of desk research in the form of a literature review. Therefore, the overarching aim of this chapter is to establish relevant policy guiding practice, review previous research conducted in the area and identify the competing discourses.

2.2 Review Methodology

A scoping method was administered to identify relevant literature. This is synonymous with providing an outline of the degree of the literature available and is commonly undertaken to examine the scope, range, and nature of research activity in a topic area. It further assists in the process of identifying gaps within the existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

The following electronic databases were searched using a range of different key words related to the subject - with Ebsco, ProQuest, JSTOR. Further searches were conducted within specific journal websites – European Journal of Social Work, Critical Social Policy, Critical Social Thinking UCC, and the Irish Journal of Social Work. Academic social network websites such as Research Gate and Academia were also explored. Given the relatively recent emergence of literature pertaining to UAMs, search terms were intentionally kept broad, using combinations of unaccompanied minors, separated children, refugee, asylum seeker, foster care, DP, Ireland. No date constraints were included in the search criteria in order to allow a full examination of the literature across time

Additional searches were conducted through the websites of advocacy groups who are vocal in the area of asylum seeker rights (i.e. NASC, IRC and Barnardos). Government websites were also examined to identify reports and policies in relation to the topic, which were in turn critically examined.

2.3 Irish and International Policy and Law

When a minor is referred to TUSLA under the Section 8(5) (a) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) the provisions of the Child Care Act (1991) are immediately invoked, this giving the State the duty to protect and provide care for such individuals. This also complies with international law such as the "1951 Refugee Convention, the 1996-7 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989)" which was ratified in Ireland in 1992 (Corbett, 2008, p. 18). In accordance with such policy a

present system has emerged whereby UAMs enter residential care or foster care, and thus, receive similar care to Irish children who enter the care system.

2.3.1 Law informing Aftercare Service

The legislation pertaining to care leavers permits aftercare to be granted on a discretionary basis. In particular, Section 45(1A) of the Child Care Act (1991) notes that "where a child leaves the care of a health board, the board may…assist him for so long as the board is satisfied as to his need for assistance". Notably, change to Section 45 is anticipated. In particular, the recent Aftercare Bill (2014) proposed that all care leavers receive a statutory care plan. However, while awaiting this change there remains ambiguity in relation to how social work teams apply Section 45 of the Child Care Act (1991).

As stated previously, the majority of UAMs enter the DP once leaving the care system, thus, implying that a UAMs status as an asylum seeker takes precedence over their status as a care leaver. Notably, this is although the State has discretionary powers to sanction such individuals to remain within the care system under Section 45 of the Child Care Act (1991). This is at odds with TUSLA's Equity of Care principle which recognises the need for UAMs to receive the same standard of "protection and care as any other child in State care". Under this principle, TUSLA further assert "that there is no differentiation of care provision, care practices, care priorities, standards or protocols" (DCYA, 2018). While using DP as system of aftercare for aged-out UAMs would suggest the contrary, the author also asserts that in embracing the true spirit of equity services must recognise that UAMs aging out need additional support in consideration of their vulnerability and needs.

2.3.2 Refugee Act (1996)

In line with Section 8(5) of the Act, it is the responsibility of the Commissioner to refer UAMs to TUSLA where provisions will be made for their care under the Child Care Act (1991). From here, an allocated social worker responsible for developing and implementing the UAMs care plan will identify whether it is in the UAMs best interest to apply for asylum under the Refugee Act (1996). The responsibility for TUSLA to support minors through the asylum process has been further noted by ORAC (2018). This illustrates the position of authority TUSLA workers are granted in relation to when an application is made on behalf of the minor. From reviewing the literature it remains unclear as to the level of agency UAMs have in the decision making process around this matter, and thus, to what degree Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) is respected. It is important to note the implications surrounding the timing of making an application. Under Section 18 (B) of the Act (1996) only individuals under 18 years of age who have attained refugee status can apply for Family Reunification with their parents.

Additionally pertaining to this Act, issues in relation to habitual residency can prevent UAMs from pursuing further education avenues. And although, Section 9(4) of the Refugee Act which prohibits a person seeking asylum from entering employment was recently deem unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, it is important to note that once rectified many factors will continue to obstruct UAMs pursuing employment such as work permit fees and the requirement to secure employment with a starting salary of €30,000 (Pollak, 2018).

2.4 Current Research

Pertaining to the scholarly world, there appears quite a scarcity of research exploring the experiences of aged-out UAMs who transition into DP on leaving foster care. Of the few authors, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) work speaks most specifically to this area. This qualitative study highlights the needs and prevalent issues pertaining to aged out UAM. In particular, it discusses the suitability of foster care in meeting the care needs of UAMs. This is worth noting given the frequent criticism the previous system of placing UAM in unsupervised hostels generated at both a national and international level; critique that in turn led to the State adapting a more 'child protective/welfare approach' (Smyth, Shannon and Dolan, 2015, p. 274). Indeed, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) work illustrates that within the family-like environment which foster care offers many young people came to develop a sense of belonging. Participants spoke about developing close bonds with foster parents. A more recent study by Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh (2018) further supports this finding. Reasonable to say, this indicates foster care to be an appropriate response to meet the needs of minors entering Ireland seeking refuge. However, worth noting is that UAMs are far from a homogenous group, and therefore, there is a need to offer different care options to meet the presenting needs of each UAM (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017).

2.4.1 Resilience Vs Vulnerability

Whilst exposing the vulnerabilities UAMs, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) work also emphasises that many display a strong degree of resilience. This is consistent with other research in the area. In particular, Smyth, Shannon and Dolan's (2015) small scale qualitative study further points to the co-existence of both vulnerability and strength within this cohort. Interestingly, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) work correlate the anticipation and uncertainty that comes with the territory of turning 18 with the mental health deterioration of some UAMs. Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) study further draws attention to the manner in which immigration status leaves UAMs exempt from many of the services and supports generally offered to individuals leaving care. Additionally, Sirriyeh and Ni Raghallaigh's (2018) study showcases that the precariousness around legal status gives rise to uncertainty during this transitory period.

2.4.2 Direct Provision

Indeed, there appears to be no shortage of literature criticising the institutionalised nature of the DP system. Correlated themes illustrated in the literature highlight the DP system as a form of social exclusion, which in turn, enforces dependency, and contributes to the poor physical and mental health of those who enter it seeking protection (Fanning, 2012; Horgan, 2017; Thornton, 2007, 2014a, 2014b). Ní Raghallaigh, Foreman and Feeley's (2016) research further illustrates the difficulty transitioning into community life after an experience of institutional living within the DP system. This raises very real and ethical issues in relation to the State's right to detain young adults within a system that may impact negatively on their psycho-social wellbeing, and perhaps in turn, their life trajectory; particularly, given the fact that the State has the discretionary powers to provide another alternative under the Child Care Act 1991. Notably, in scoping the literature the author failed to find statistic regarding the number of UAMs who transition from foster care into DP. Questions further remain in relation to the travel distance generally involved in such transitions, and the average length of time former UAMs spend in DP waiting for their status to be decided.

2.5 Recent Government Publications

2.5.1 Working Group to Report to Government Working Group on the Protection Process on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers (The McMahon Report, 2015)

On reviewing recent government publications it appears that additional supports may only be granted to aging out UAMs on the grounds of 'exceptional vulnerability' (The McMahon Report, 2015, p.229). How such an intangible concept is possibly measured goes notably unexamined within the report. However, the report does go so far as to advocate resilience training to be provided to help UAM adjust into a system which arguably denies them basic human rights. Perhaps, this can be considered a prime example of neo-liberal politics, whereby, policy promotes individual responsibility, thus ignoring the undeniable environmental factors contributing to the vulnerability aged out UAM may be experiencing. Here, the State avoids taking any sincere form of political action to address issues of inequality, injustice and human rights which are clearly associated with the system of DP.

Interestingly, Thornton (2015) likens the treatment of asylum seekers in Ireland to "the 'Poor Law' concept of less eligibility" (p.29). Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton (2017) further argue 'political suspicion' to be a factor influencing the poor practice that exists in relation to the aftercare supports offered to aged out UAMs, noting that this may act as a deterrent to potential newcomers.

On further review of the McMahon Report what becomes most pronounced is the lack of analysis in relation to the human rights issues associated with DP. In effect, the general focus of the McMahon Report tends to be on reducing the length of time individuals stay within the reception centres as well as improving the more static elements of the DP system (i.e. nutritional audits, size of living space, private lockers). However, it must be noted that when change is advocated, it is generally followed with the term "in so far as practicable". Indeed, this phrase appears 19 times throughout the report, which in effect, begs the question "does the McMahon Report have any real purpose in ushering in effective change?" From critically analysing the report, it is the author's concern that such soft recommendations act as an avoidance strategy, whereby, the imperative need for DP to cease continues to go ignored and the politics of control are allowed to continue. This again gives further rise to the argument that DP is not a suitable environment for a care leaver.

2.5.2 Value for Money Report 2010

Indeed, one may only look to the 2010 Value for Money Report for evidence that strategies are being deployed to avoid improving the living and financial conditions of asylum seekers in order to avoid creating 'pull factors' for new asylum seekers.

"Granting entitlement to Social Welfare and Rent Allowance could also be a 'pull factor' and the numbers of new asylum seekers could rise significantly" (RIA, 2010 p.58).

Such governmental tactics illustrated above allow asylum seekers to live inevitably in a situation of State-sanctioned poverty. Within such political discourses, it is clear that asylum seekers are viewed problematically as opposed to individuals worthy of having their basic human rights respected and protected. Notably the personal allowance granted to asylum seekers at present is €21.60 for both adult and child (Citizens Information, 2018). Such a limited monetary allowance acts as a factor in isolating UAMs from the wider society.

2.6 UAMs transitioning into DP

A study conducted by Quinn, Joyce and Gusciute (2014) funded by the Irish Department of Justice asserts that as a UAM is transitioning into adulthood regular joint meeting are held between TUSLA and RIA to identify a suitable reception centre, and that during this process the preference of the young person is taken into account.

On the contrary to this 'child centred approach' to transition, a policy document by RIA advices that by locating UAMs outside of Dublin the likelihood of being exposed to exploitation, crime and drug abuse is reduced. Indeed, further reasoning for this strategy was that within more rural locations there would be less pressure on resources which would in turn increase the potential of aging-out UAMs to access suitable supports (Joyce and

Quinn, 2009). Similarly, while the McMahon Report advocates for vulnerabilities to be taken into account, it further notes that 'protection applicants do not have any input as such into the decision-making process (2015, p.156). While this is arguably at odds with Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), it also illustrates a failure to take into account the social isolation that may come from locating UAMs in rural locations with limited access to social outlets, and from further severing individuals from established social networks.

This in turn, illustrates a general lack of clarity as to how the dispersal of UAMs is decided, which Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) correlates directly with high levels of stress and vulnerability among UAM on approaching 18. Notably, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton (2017) maintains that that the anticipation of this unclear transition can "mitigate against their best interests" of the child. This further showcases that due to the rigours of the asylum process vulnerability is not only experienced at the social level but at the legal as well.

2.7 Conclusion

Through the process of reviewing the literature a number of questions appear presently unanswered. Pertaining to aftercare, questions remain as to what degree social work teams are applying Section 45 of the Child Care Act (1991). Additionally, little appears to be known as to whether the input of UAMs is sought in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) in its design and implementation of the aftercare plan. This review further illustrates the conflicting discourses that prevail in relation to how decisions making process around aftercare are made. This in turn, raises concern about the substantial consequences UAMs experience within such ambiguity.

Further logistical questions arise in relation to the process of applying for status. At present there appears to be an absence of research into the level of legal advice provided to UAMs in terms of applying for asylum under the Refugee Act (1996). As noted above, when an application is made for asylum has the potential to have significant implications on family reunification processes. In considering this, there is a need to ascertain whether UAMs are provided with accurate information about the asylum process, and to also determine whether UAMs are provided with an opportunity to have their views articulated and given due regard in consideration with their age and maturity of the applicant. This illustrates a strong degree of ambiguity in relation to how policy influences practice. Notwithstanding, this further affirms the author's decision to conduct primary research to capture how this transitionary period is experienced by UAMs.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the reasons for undertaking a participatory approach to research. It will outline the theoretical underpinnings which informed the research process and discuss the methods deployed in carrying out this study. It will move on to detail the research paradigms used including the ontology and epistemology approaches administered. It will also discuss the methods of qualitative research deployed, and the data collection process and analysis carried out. This chapter will conclude by highlighting the limitations, and discuss the ethical considerations involved in carrying out this study.

3.2 CARL and Community-based participatory research (CBPR)

CARL is a Community Academic Research Links initiative within UCC, which provides independent research to Civil Society Organisations (CSO) such as Nasc. It is a participatory approach, which requires collaboration at the local level to solve "a pressing community problem or effecting social change" (Strand *et al.,* 2003, p. 3). This in turn, reflects the very nature of social work practice, which according to IASW (nd) "promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being". Staff members at Nasc were consulted in relation to the research design, and thus played a pivotal role in the formation of the questions being asked. Additionally in adopting a Freirean approach, it is acknowledged that learning materializes through a collaborative process which recognises the participant as the export by experience, and further provides an avenue for the voices of individuals who are often deemed marginalised within society to emerge (Selener, 1997); this was a primary motivator in the researcher decision to complete a community-based participatory research dissertation.

3.3 Ontology

Ontology in its essence is defined by Crotty as "the study of being" in the world (2003, p.10). In this regard the researcher recognised that as individuals see social phenomena differently and in relation to the their 'role, values and background' that there is effectively no correct or incorrect manner in which reality is perceived (Dilts and Delozier, 2000, p.16),

Consequently, for the purpose of this research, the researcher adopted a social constructionist ontological position. Within this domain, it is recognised that one's interpretation of the social world is subjective, which in turn, gives rise to the idea that

multiple realities are possible in relation to the same social context (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In light of this, from a reflexive position the researcher understood the importance of recognising and attempting to let go of her preconceived assumptions in order to provide each participant with a space to construct meaning in the manner that feels honest and real to them.

3.4 Epistemology

Ontology's central concern is in regard to what is 'in' the world, while epistemology endeavours to understand how we 'know' the world through discourse and power. In effect, it is 'a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know' (Crotty, 2003, p.3). It is further "concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p.10). In reference to the aims and objectives, the study has a dual focus of constructing meaning and identifying systemic issues that arise through policy, thus, after much deliberation the researcher decided to adopt a mixed methods approach. Firstly, as the researcher recognises that meaning is not discovered but instead constructed an interpretivist framework was applied.

However as interpretivism tends to take a less critical stance (Crotty, 2003), the researcher further recognised the relevance in blending this epistemological position with critical theory in an effort to meet the study's aims and objectives. Critical theory can be described as mechanism to "investigate, query and critique established practices, institutions, conventions policy" and to identify if social injustice and inequality are an issue (Carey, 2009, p.56). In relation to this study, critical theory supported the researcher's effort to identify whether a two tiered system of aftercare exists for individuals leaving care. Thus, the blending of both perspectives provided a platform to explore the causes and impact of policy and practice on the lives of UAMs who age out of the care system and into DP.

3.5 Methodology

Schwandt (2007) describes methodology as a process of inquiry used to "seek out new knowledge' (p.190). Concurring with an interpretivist and critical theoretical approach, the method used within this study was qualitative. In particular, through semi-structured interviews, the author sought to provide each participant with the freedom to articulate their experiences and opinion in a natural and free flowing manner. Through deploying this method the researcher sought to take a position that reflected empathic neutrality.

3.6 Methods

3.6.1 Literature Review

Through the process of carrying out a literature review the researcher was able to gain a more informed stance pertaining to the subject matter. In doing so, she became more familiar with the policy guiding practice in this specific area. In adopting a critical stance, the researcher further identified areas where policy and government reports promoted practices which were at odds with the best interests of UAMs. Through the process of reviewing academic research available, further concern arose regarding the lack of clear rights based policy guiding the faith of UAMs as they transition through the Irish Care System and into DP. From here, research questions were formed to capture both the experience of UAMs aging out of Foster Care, and the service supports offered during this process.

3.6.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Access to participants was granted by undertaking this study through the UCC CARL programme. As it is a participatory research study, participants were identified through the Nasc liaison worker. In particular, participants were recruited through means of a purposive sampling approach. This comprises of selecting a number of participants who share similar characteristics applicable to the study criteria (Carey, 2009). In keeping with this approach, recruitment was based upon an inclusion criterion, whereby participants who engaged in the study experienced arriving in to Ireland as unaccompanied minors and subsequently being placed into foster homes. All participants experienced transitioning into DP once they reached the age of eighteen years.

The exclusion criteria screened out any individuals who may be at risk of experiencing psychological distress as a result of participating in the research. Additionally, participants were screened out in cases where language was identified as a communication barrier. The screening process was carried out by the liaison worker in Nasc. As the researcher had no part in the selection and screening process the likelihood of selection bias was controlled, thus increasing the validity of the findings.

3.6.3 Data Collection

The author reasoned that qualitative research was an effective way of collecting data in order to capture the complexity is the subject matter. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with the process and meaning associated with events, thus, meeting the objective of this study. It was decided that semi-structured interviews was a suitable mechanism by which the subjective meanings and experiences of aged out UAMs could be explored.

A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry which combines both pre-planned and unstructured questions to facilitate scope in how the researcher may respond to particular answers (Carey, 2009). In particular, broad questions stemming from the research aims were used as a guide to enable flexibility of scope emerge from the interaction. However, with the researcher's intention to identify issues relating to services, prompts were used where necessary to attain specific information (see Appendix 2). This approach allowed a rich amount of data to emerge and themes to arise naturally in order to answer the research questions.

Additionally, in honouring the anti-oppressive and social justice element of both CBPR and the social work profession, the researcher maintained that the semi-structured approach further provided a space where the participant could emerge as an expert in this area in his/her own right. After all, each participant is an expert by experience, and considering this, they are "best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon" (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 48).

3.6.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of the recorded data followed a thematic approach. This involved uncovering themes which emerged from the qualitative research method deployed in an effort to detect thematic similarities that assist the researcher answer initial research questions (Carey, 2009). In consideration of the epistemological approach deployed, the author considered this form of analysis most suitable in meeting the research objectives to capture meaning, whilst also applying critical theory to identify systemic issues. From here, arising themes were identified and merged to convey an extensive depiction of the collective experiences of the participants. Following this, themes were critically analysed against the policy framing practice.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

An ethical review form was completed and submitted to the UCC School of Applied Social Studies Ethics Review Board for approval in advance of carrying out research. The primary ethical concern was the potential for vulnerability to emerge within the discussion of the topic, which involved participants retrospectively reflecting on their experience transitioning from foster care into DP. As previously discussed, participants who were identified as having a potential to experience mental distress as a result of participating were screened out by the liaison worker at Nasc. Additionally at the end of each interview, a debriefing conversation was carried out and information in relation to suitable supported services was provided to each participant.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

Research aims were communicated clearly to all participants and informed consent were provided and signed prior to commencing the interview. An information sheet was provided to each participant, detailing the nature and purpose of the study, incorporating research aims, objectives and questions, and outlining the purposes for which the research data may be used. Where issues of language were identified as a barrier when obtaining informed consent the potential participant was screened out. Participants were informed of the possibility for the research piece to be published and made available for public access once completed. Additionally, participants were clearly informed that participation is entirely voluntary and of the right to withdraw from the interview at any stage.

3.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The researcher's responsibility to safely secure data and maintain each participant's anonymity was of principal consideration throughout the study. Therefore, all participant information was fully anonymised and no identifying information is included in the research outputs. Additionally, information derived from the data collection phase was stored on an encrypted computer and also on the secure UCC student server

3.8 Limitations

Due to the constraints in terms of the time and scope of this dissertation, it was only feasible to conduct a small-scale research study. Additionally, although the researcher interviewed four participants as two interviews unfolded it transcribed that the participants did not meet the criteria, thus, in honouring the conditions in which ethical approval was sought both participants were screened out accordingly. This in turn, left the researcher with two participants for the purpose of the study. Considering this, the researcher acknowledges that the findings derived have emerged from a relatively small number of participants, and therefore, does not offer a comprehensive assessment to the lived experience of the wider population of ageing out UAMs.

On a reflective note, the author recognises her positionality as an outsider attempting to understand a world she has not directly experienced, and how this may give rise to misinterpretation. In particular, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) maintain that research can never be truly unbiased, and thus, must endeavour to investigate their preconceptions and make them transparent. Therefore, in an attempt to recognise her positionality and how this may influence how she interprets the data, the researcher kept a reflective research journal throughout her research process to tease out her assumptions, bias, feeling etc.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has given a comprehensive account of the planning process which led to the research design as well as the strategies involved in meeting the aims of the study. In doing so, it illustrated the researcher's reasoning for undertaking qualitative research which was underpinned by social constructionist ontology, and for further blending interpretivism and critical theory in her epistemological approach in order to achieve the objectives of this study. Additionally, this chapter explored the ethical considerations and limitations of conducting a study through the medium of qualitative research.

Chapter 4: Research Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this analysis the researcher endeavours to understand the meanings aged-out UAMs associate with the transition from foster care into DP, as well as identifying common themes and systemic issues relating to this process. Consequently, this chapter presents and analyses the primary research findings derived from interviews conducted with two UAMs. Through the process of semi-structured interviews the themes arising emerged in a naturalistic and conversation like manner. Such methods are in keeping with the ethos of CBPR whereby local community members engage in research to present their experiences and perspectives. Out of the preliminary themes identified those relating to the purpose of this project were selected. Thus, this chapter will focus on four main themes which will be critically analysed by reference to the policy and practice influencing each theme. This is turn, corresponds with the blending of interpretivism and critical theory in meeting aims of the study as discussed in Chapter 3. For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity, the names of participants have been omitted.

The following table illustrates the profiles of the 2 former UAMs that participated in this study:

Table 1: Demographic of Participants

Respondent	Gender	Entered Care System	Duration in Foster Care	Duration in DP	Age attaining status	Area of Origin
Respondent 1	Male	17	3 months	6 months	18	Western Asia
Respondent 2	Male	16	2 years	4 years	24	Central Africa

4.2 Theme 1: The Relevance of Human Connection

> *I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel - Maya Angelou*

Due to its significance this has been selected as the first theme to document in this chapter. Interestingly, whether events were measured as good or bad appears to be influenced by

the relationships each participant formed as they moved through the Irish care system and into DP.

4.2.1 Foster Care to DP

Existing research illustrates that suitability of foster care in meeting the needs of UAMs (Horgan, 2017; Ní Raghallaigh, 2017), however, from interviewing Respondent 1 it appears that this is largely dependent on the suitability of the match, as well as the foster parents ability to engage in a way that builds trust, understanding and illustrates respect.

Contrary to this, Respondents 1's recalls being treated with suspicion and felt that his foster parents were invasive and inappropriate in the questions they asked. Resulting from this experience, he expressed contentment moving out of foster care and into DP, where he shared a room with an adult male who shared similar life views, who was generous with information and played a part in helping Respondent 1 integrate into his new environment.

> *"To tell you the truth they [foster parents] were asking me terrible questions…imagine like when they open the news they were asking me about ISIS…I think that things that they shouldn't ask a refugee, especially if he's under 18… that's why most of the time I stay in my bedroom"*

> *"Moving from foster care to a direct provision for me, like personally, it was good, because, you know, I have a lot of problems with them [Foster Parents] and I just wanted to get away for my Social Worker"*

When discussing his new roommate in DP, Respondent 1 reflects positively:

> *"So yeah, this is a great person. He was very helpful. I was asking him a lot of questions—what's the rules? How is everything?-He was teaching me everything"*

On a reflective note, this was quite paradoxical to the researcher's preconceived views of how the research findings would emerge, however, Respondent 1 articulated clearly that he understood that his experience was relative to his relationship with his foster care parents.

> *"I know another who have two brilliant foster carers…They're perfect. They're taking him out to other cities, visiting. Like everything worked perfect. I wish if I'm with them. At that stage I wouldn't even go to direct provision. Definitely I will stay with them. So it depends who was your foster care and your experience with them"*

In Respondent 2's case, he viewed his foster care experience with more positively, and discussed forming healthy relationships and integrating well into the wider community. As a result, he expressed distress at having to leave all this on turning 18 when having to move into a DP centre in another city.

> *"It's two years great friends. You know where to go. You know who to meet, you know, and all this. Now you've got to go and start again everything from zero. It's not easy, you know"*

The severing of such positive relationships was a significant stressor when Respondent 2 moved into DP where it is apparent that he experienced much isolation.

> *"When I turn 18 you throw me with a lot of others, you know. This is why I really struggle. I couldn't talk to people because everywhere I look it's just like forty-five maybe, there's no one from my age, you know".*

4.2.2 Contact with TUSLA

As illustrated in Chapter 3, the aim of this study was to capture meaning and identify systemic issues. It was not a particular intension of the researcher to highlight a poor standard in social work practice; the question list in Appendix 1 reflects this. However, this was a theme that arose naturally during both interviews. Comments by respondents illustrated a standard of social work practice which appeared at stark odds with the code of ethics governing the profession which acknowledges the intrinsic worth of each individual, and for social workers to use their power in an appropriate and anti-oppressive manner (IASW, nd).

Indeed both Respondent 1 and 2's experience with social workers reflected a culture of suspicion and oppression. Similarly, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton's (2017) research indicates that political suspicion has been linked to justification of poor practice. Respondent 1's experience on entering Ireland and meeting a TUSLA social worker on the first day reflects this issue well.

> *"I was stopped in Dublin Airport. So a social worker come from TUSLA started investigating why you come…how age are you, and everything. The worst point they took out my phone, money, everything…And even like my mother and father were calling me on my phone and they refused to answer and just tell them that I'm here, I'm safe… let me just speak and like…just let them hear my voice. They refused. Yeah, and they take me to a home. I think that's what you call foster care"*

While the quote above clearly illustrates oppressive practice, it further demonstrates how in this case the migrant status took precedence over the fact that the respondent was within the legal domain of childhood. This would appear at odds with Section 3 of the Child Care Act (1991), whereby TUSLA is obliged to regard the welfare of the child as the first and paramount consideration. It further appears contrary to TUSLA's Equity of Care principle which recognises the need to treat all children equally.

Additionally, it is important to note that Respondent 1 discussed a general lack of knowledge regarding the role and function of TUSLA as an organisation, which in turn, highlights a need for clear role clarification from the very first engagement with UAMs.

> *"I thought that when they take me and they start the investigation in the TUSLA office that was the application for asylum seeker. I have no idea about that firstly"*

Similarly Respondent 2's experience engaging with his social worker further reflects a poor standard practice, and in particular a dishonouring of Section 3 of the Child Care Act 1991 which acknowledges the right to give due consideration to the wishes of the child.

> *"For me I don't know, I don't know if she is doing the right things, to be honest, because anything you ask she just put you off straight…you know, the way she just answer it, it's go away"*

Further reflecting on his experience Respondent 2 noted:

> *"it really hurts, you know. I was taking it lightly but now, since I become maybe more mature, when I think back, you know, this is really bad, like. It's not good- Why are you talking to me like this?"*
>
> *"For me, like, social workers should act like a mother. She's not going to be a real mother but she should act like that, you know. I think they should put people who they really care about children".*

In writing the findings it is difficult to capture the depth of emotion expressed by Respondent 2 when delivering the two quotations above. However, it became clear to the researcher by the way his disposition changed during this communication that the lack of respect and support he experienced continued to impact him.

It is important to note that Respondent 2 describes a very different experience when engaging with his aftercare worker, who he referred to regularly over the course of the interview as "*the nice lady*".

> *"Yeah, I have a lot of respect for her. She's doing her job. She wanted to help, you know. I don't think she has a lot of power, but I think she should be a leader. The way she treats you—you feel straight like she's doing everything she can, you know"*
>
> *"She listens to you when you say something and she says hi to everyone"*

Similarly to Respondent 2's negative experience, the above quotation illustrates the lasting impact of good practice. It illustrates the value and appreciation that comes with being greeted with warmth, and a sincere willingness to assist and support.

4.2.3 Discussion

In exploring the transition of aged out UAMs from foster care into Direct Provision (DP) it appears that a primary influencer in regards whether this was positive or negative came down to the relationships formed during this period. In relation to foster care, it highlighted the need for UAMs to be placed in foster care settings that meet the individual needs of the young person, and where there is awareness and sensitivity regarding the UAMs journey and background, and in this regard, meets the criteria set out in the The National Standards for foster care set out by the Department of Health and Children (DOHC, 2003).

Pertaining to social work practice, the researcher is mindful that this study captures the service users' perspective, and in doing so, neglects to identify the complexity that social workers face working among the legal, social and political dimensions that emerge when working with UAMs. However, it does highlight the impact of both positive and negative practices, and need for UAMs to encounter a human intermediary whom they trust is working in their best interest.

4.3 Theme 2 Communication

4.3.1Involving Relocation

A second prevalent theme which arose was the lack of negotiation and input UAMs experienced in the relocation process. In both Respondent 1 and 2's experience their opinion was not sought, this is despite both being transferred from the Dublin area to a reception centre in Cork. Respondent 1 discussed finding out from his foster parents who he maintained received a letter in the post 3 to 4 days before his 18th birthday.

> *"As I remember it was few days maybe 3 or 4 days they [foster parents] receive a paper in the post that says that I will be moving to Direct Provision at my 18th birthday… I will be going to Cork on that date… told me that you will be going to a Direct Provision and there will be a meal and everything"*

Similarly, Respondent 2's opinion was not sought in regards his relocation. This is despite the fact that Respondent 2 was relocating the summer after completing 5th year and before moving into Leaving Certificate. As the interview unfolded it was clear that this moved caused Respondent 2 much distress.

> *"This is where it's becoming very difficult. I did everything I can, you know, but they say no. The school wrote a letter to [Department of] Justice—look, he's a very good student; he just needs to finish; give him one year in Dublin to finish his Leaving Certificate".*

When attempting to negotiate this decision with his social worker, Respondent 2 recalls:

> *"They said to me no, only Cork. 'Why are there no other options?' 'I don't know, we don't decide. The [Department of] Justice decides"*

4.3.2 Design and Implementation of Aftercare Programme

Respondent 2 maintained that he had an Aftercare Plan in place, and as discussed earlier, noted the positive and supportive relationship he had with his Aftercare Worker. It was through his Aftercare programme that he was connected with Barnardos who funded his way through third level education while he waited to receive refugee status

However, when asked whether he had much contact with TUSLA after transitioned into DP, Respondent 2 asserted:

> *"I didn't have contact with my social worker. So I called her and I ask can she direct me. I think she's not really a helper."*

Interestingly, when Respondent 1 was asked about his input into his Aftercare Plan, he maintained:

> *"I was homeless several times even before my family came. I have nowhere to go. I stay like sleeping streets. Then I start googling the information. I read that there's something called aftercare from TUSLA, but no one told me about it. I have no idea what is it".*

4.3.3 Discussion

Linking back to the Literature Review carried out in Chapter 2, the experiences of Respondent 1 and 2 appears in stark contrast to the collaborative process that is argued to take between place TUSLA and RIA to develop a person-centred approach to relocation, which takes into account the preference of the UAMs. Similar to Theme 1 it further highlights the importance for social workers to build therapeutic relationships and offer practical assistance to service users. In linking to the very principles governing the profession, social workers must "provide service users with full information", and should be "prepared to state the reasons for their decisions and be accountable for them" (IASW, nd). A failure to do so can be deemed oppressive, and therefore, at odds with both the CORU (2014) guiding proficiencies and IASW's (nd) code of ethics.

This theme further raises question regarding the degree of power social workers have in the negotiation process with RIA. Perhaps this is indicative of the need for social workers to reconnect with the key profession values of social justice and advocate at both the intra and interagency level for emancipatory change in this domain.

In relation to aftercare as stated previously this is legally permitted to be granted on a discretionary basis based on vulnerability. Additionally, Quinn, Joyce and Gusciute (2014) established that aftercare planning usually starts at the age of 16, perhaps this gives rise to why Respondent 1 did not hear about the Aftercare Programme until after he attained status. However, in light of the fact that he experienced a period of homelessness it is indicative that he faced vulnerabilities after exiting DP. Additionally, given the short period of time that those who come after their 16th birthday have spent in Ireland when transitioning into DP, it is reasonable to assume that they need ongoing support in understanding the legal, social, cultural and political dimensions of their host nation. Thus, the author would contend that all UAMs should be offered the support of an Aftercare programme in which their input into the design and implementation is sought.

4.4 Theme 3: The Asylum Process

4.4.1 Voice and Agency

As previously stated, it is the responsibility of TUSLA to support UAMs throughout the process and decide when it is most suitable to make an application on their behalf (ORAC, 2018). In Chapter 2, the question was further raised as to what degree of agency UAMs are granted in relation to this domain and whether their voice is given due weight in accordance with age and maturity, and in keeping in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC.

However, in relation to agency UAMs it appears that Respondent 1 experienced continued resistance from his social worker when voicing a desire to apply for asylum before turning 18. As stated earlier the timing around when an application is made has implications as to whether one can apply for family reunification for his parents and siblings. Notably, this is information Respondent 1 claimed he attained through his own research online.

> *So I start calling them—I want to apply, I want to apply—and they were planning to like take it further and further until I reach 18.*
>
> *"Before I turned 18 by about 15 days I told them I'm going to apply myself…I thought that if I apply under 18 I will have the right to get my family here. So they were refusing and saying no, wait, we will sort it out… That's the worst thing in TUSLA. There's another like girl I already know. She's in Dublin. They took around seven months to let her apply to asylum—imagine—to avoid her getting her family here, so she would reach 18."*

However, later on Respondent 1 stated that he recognised that deterring UAMs from applying until they are 18 years of age is not a universal practice by TUSLA and that he knew of examples where UAMs received a good standard of support from social worker during the process.

"Maybe it's about the social worker who you are dealing with. Because I hear from another, like, people who are under 18, they was with good social workers, like really honest social workers. They were giving information they required, do the best, like, to get their families and apply for asylum and everything. So I think it's not about TUSLA itself, it's about choosing the right social worker."

4.4.2 Length of Time

There was a significant discrepancy in the length of time both respondents waited to attain Refugee Status. Respondent 1 achieved his in 9 months, while Respondent 2 waited 6 years to attain status. Arguably this may have been another important variable in how each participant experienced the transition into living in DP. Interestingly, Respondent 1 acknowledges how fortunate he was to attain status rather quickly, compared with as he asserted *"Africans who spend maybe six or seven or eight years to get their residency"*. Perhaps this in turn, suggests a degree of racial discrimination within the system.

Notably, a prevalent theme running through Respondent 2's interview process was the impact not having status had at the social level and excluded him from engaging in community activities.

"I can't even go play soccer in a club because I have no papers. If I'm good in soccer I represent Ireland. A hundred percent I'd represent—no, I can't go because I have no paper. Anything that you can do you have no paper."

Additionally, Respondent 2 expressed the effect the timely process living in DP had on his mental wellbeing. He particularly related the process to hindering an individual's ability to contribute to society.

"I don't see the point, like, where you just hold someone and hold someone until he's like mentally destroyed or emotionally destroyed, like, you know, so on and so on and then you give him status. He's not going to help support the country. He's not going to be useful for society. He can't because maybe he's not himself anymore. Do you know what I mean?

Here, it is particularly relevant to bring the reader's attention back to the line "*He can't because maybe he's not himself anymore".* This sentence captures the irreversible damage that is caused by a system that allows people to stay for years in a state of limbo. Respondent 1 went on to further advice:

"Don't make him loose hope. Don't make him wait so long in the hostel, you know. Don't say he can't go university. Just look at him like any Irish kid"

4.4.3 Discussion

Here, many of the points outlined in the discussion under Theme 2 similarly. There is a need for professionals to communicate in a way that is transparent. In relation to applying for refugee status, UAMs deserve to be informed of the pros and cons of applying at particular times and have the opportunity to give an informed input with due consideration being given to age and maturity on the matter.

This theme further gave rise to the impact that living in DP for a long period of time has on the psycho-social wellbeing of former UAMs. This raises ethical issues in relation to a system which confines individuals within a system which can impact an individual so negatively.

4.5 Theme 4: Resilience

In spite of their challenging journey moving through the Irish system and attaining status, resilience was a clear theme that emerged while interviewing both respondents. This correlates with previous research carried out by Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton (2017) and Smith et al. (2015).

4.5.1 Faith

Emerging naturally during both interviews was the significance of religious faith as a coping mechanism. This is a theme previously captured in a qualitative study carried out by Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010). Indeed for both this was an anchor keeping them steady through difficult times. In particular, Respondent 2 noted:

> *"Like all can be wrong, everything and I can't go on anymore- but then I pray and I give everything over then I feel better…I don't say that I'm perfect and pray 5 times everyday. No. But when I do I know it will be ok"*

4.5.2 Desire to contribute positively to Irish Society

Again, illustrating much resilience both respondents expresses a great degree of gratitude to have attained Refugee Status in Ireland, and very positively, both shared a similar love for Ireland and intention to contribute to Irish society. As noted by Respondent 2:

> *"I'm going to represent Ireland because I'm going to see myself as Irish…They helped in this way. They kept me safe, you know. That's my home. Black, white, I don't care. You know, this is my country now. This is the country I'm going to represent. I'm going to very positively represent"*

While Respondent 1 expressed:

> *"There is a voluntary thing with the Gardaí I'm thinking to take with them. Like work with the Gardaí for up to three months in the holiday. I've already spoken to them here in Limerick. They need someone who speaks Arabian like to help them with the Arabian community in their stuff. Yeah, so I will go for it just because I love Ireland"*

4.5.3 Discussion

While the above captures a strong degree of resilience, it is important to note that this may be influenced by the criteria to screen out individual who may find the interview process emotionally challenging, and for this reason may not depict an accurate description of UAMs who have aged out of the care system and into DP. Indeed, evidence supporting this hypothesis emerged while interviewing Respondent 2 who recalled watching the slow psychological deterioration of a fellow UAM who also aged out of care, and following this remained in DP for a number of years. This again illustrates the ethical issues around confining former UAMs within a system which can impact an individual so negatively.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to understand the data through the blending of both an interpretive paradigm with a critical theoretical framework. The author pertains that in turn captured the experience of both respondents who moved from the care system into DP, and the systemic issues that influenced this process. The following chapter endeavours to respond to this data with recommendations for policy and practice reform and future research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Having conducted a literature review and undertaken primary research, this closing chapter will highlight the key findings of the study and outline recommendations arising from the data collected and subsequent analysis. At different stages throughout this chapter the limitations of the study will be discussed. Additionally, the implications for social work practice and opportunities for further research will be explored. Following this, the study will conclude with a reflective enquiry to capture the authors experience engaging with the research process.

5.2 Final Discussion

In returning to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, the central aim of this study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how UAMs experience the transition from foster into DP. Through the use of an extensive literature review it became evident that there is a general lack of clarity in relation to how decisions are made surrounding this transitionary period, with different reports and documents offering conflicting strategies to inform this process. This in turn, illustrated the need to explore UAMs direct experience in order to ascertain the degree of voice and agency they are afforded during this process.

By carrying out primary research, the author had an opportunity to explore the questions above. Although the study was small the data proved rich and fruitful. The most pronounced theme emerging for this study was the importance of human connection. Which in effect, goes back the fundamentals of social work practice which acknowledges the value of building meaningful relationships with service users and offering a person-centred approach (Ruch, Turney, and Ward, 2010). Indeed it appeared the quality of the relationships formed during the transition between foster care and DP which had the most effect on the overall experience. Although not generalizable due to sample size, the data suggests a disappointing and oppressive response from the social workers who were allocated the task of supporting both respondents. Notably, the author is conscious that in capturing the experience of UAMs, this study neglects to capture how social workers experience balancing the care and control elements of their role where the legal status of the service users is also an influencing variable.

The study further showcased very pertinent systemic issues around the processes of moving care leaver out of the Irish Care System and into DP, and the lack of agency, voice and communication issues that appeared to exist within this process. Thus, for progressive

change to occur the onus is not merely on professionals to develop a relationship based practice but for reform at the structural level.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1 Safeguarding Strategy

This study proposes the need for a clear governmental strategy which sets out a coherent approach to safeguard and promote the welfare needs of all UAMs from entry through to aftercare. Such a document must be guided under the principle that UAMs are children first.

5.3.2 Foster Care

Although the author would contend that foster care is a progressive step when compared with the previously system of hostel 'care', this study has showcased that it is not merely the type of care that is important but the level of care offered within that environment. Thus, carers should be recruited on the basis of interest and proficiency to meet the complex needs of UAMs. Considering this, the author suggests for foster carers to be given specialist training designed to equip them with the skills necessary to provide a safe and supportive environment. Additionally, regular communication between foster parents, UAMs and social worker is necessary in order support and monitor the suitability of the placements. Contrary to Respondent 2's experience, UAMs should never be expected to move out of foster care while completing secondary education unless it is clearly in his/her best interest.

5.3.3 TUSLA

The SWTSCSA needs to expand its Dublin base to offer a nationwide service. Until then, social workers who work with UAMs must be proficient in their understanding in relation in immigration law, and appropriate training should be granted where necessary. Additionally, TUSLA workers must position themselves in an advocacy role when working alongside RIA and other immigration services, with the primary concern always being the best interests of the child. In this regard, the status of the UAM as a child must always take precedence very their status as a migrant. Moreover, TUSLA is responsible for making the decision in relation to when someone is discharged from care system – this decision must always be made under the principle of best interest and with due weight being given to the UAM's views in accordance with age and maturity; a process which would appear not the case in Respondent 2's situation.

While the author contends that using DP as a form is aftercare is at odds with the TUSLA Equity of Care principle, she also stresses that TUSLA must recognise that 'equity of care' is not merely about treating all children equally as they assert, but to recognise that different individual circumstances need different supports.

5.3.4 Aftercare

At the policy level, the Aftercare Bill must be enacted, and thus, no longer be offered on a discretionary basis. This would potentially act as a catalyst to formalise good practice. However until this is achieved, the vulnerability of aging out UAMs both socially and legally must be recognised as reason enough for all to be granted an aftercare plan regardless of the age they enter the system.

Additionally, UAMs aging out of care should be afforded a number of different aftercare options pertaining to their individual needs. As stated by Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh (2017, p2), "UAMs are a diverse group in terms of culture, ethnicity and religion", and therefore, a set response to aftercare provisions is not appropriate in meeting such individual needs. As State care is considered a step in helping an individual secure a more successful and sustainable living arrangement (Arnold, 2015), the author clearly problematizes using DP for aftercare purposes. As noted by Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton (2017), DP "controls and confines" UAMs "to years of shared bedrooms, unable to decide when to eat or what to eat, and denied educational and employment opportunities" (p.400).

5.3.5 Application Process

Respondent 2 clearly illustrated the social and psychological cost involved in waiting years for his asylum application to be decided. Consistent with other research, this study also illustrated how through no fault of their own individuals are being detained in a system which keeps their lives in a state of limbo for an indefensibly long period of time. Therefore, this author argues the pertinent need for the Department of Justice to address the clear ethical issues involved in holding individuals in centres for an indefinite period of time, and make a statutory commitment to creating a fair status determination procedure which would be completed within a specific period of time.

5.3.5 Work and Further Education

Considering the role of education in facilitating the transition to adulthood and developing autonomy, access to third level education should be supported. Regardless of issues pertaining to habitual residency, UAMs should be privileged with the same level of opportunity and funding as there Irish counterpart. Aged-out UAMs should also have the same right to access employment to facilitate growing independence.

5.4 Implications for Social Work Practice

"A careful, considered and empathetic approach to an unaccompanied or separated child builds trust and brings the child's information and viewpoints to bear in the process" (UNHCR, 2014)

It is the author's perspective that social work is always most effective when it is carried out within the context of an honest and trusting relationship. Thus, it is the onus of the social worker to build on this from the first point of contact. In effect, relationship-building is a critical component to determining the best interests of children. Although small scale and therefore not generalizable this study highlighted examples of poor practice and its impact on those who are at the receiving end of it. In light of this, the author stresses the importance for social workers to constantly re-associate themselves with the ethics which guide practice and consider whether they are honouring such principles. It is the author's opinion that this can only be fully realised if practitioners develop their reflective abilities.

In relation to working with UAMs, social workers must recognise the dual component of vulnerability and strength that is often present in such individuals, and in understanding this, work in way that fosters resilience whilst putting in appropriate interventions to reduce risk. Furthermore, social worker must avoid any tendency to let legal status dominate the standard of service provided, as stated earlier UAMs must be regarded as children first.

However, the author acknowledges the complexity of offering a person-centred within legal restrictions whereby status is in limbo, and within an employment sector known for heavy caseloads and resource issues. Additionally, the author is aware that this study does not capture the perspective of social workers, and therefore acknowledges much of the wider story remains missing. However, in view of the findings the argument can be raised that social workers must reconnect with the social justice component of their role, and use their professional association to engage in critical debate with immigration authorities, government agencies in order to ameliorate inequalities and encourage rights based reform.

5.5 Opportunities for Further Research

5.5.1 Qualitative

As previously acknowledged this study is small scale and part of a relatively small dissertation. Additionally as noted in Chapter 1 questions where kept broad in order to capture a general overview. Therefore, the author suggests for more extensive studies to be carried within the themes emerging from this study. Additionally, it is important for further research to involve a larger number of participants to achieve a more comprehensive picture. The author further notes the relevance of carrying out research with professionals working in the area as this also serves to offer another perspective.

5.5.2 Quantitative

As noted in Chapter 2, the author was unable to identify statistical information regarding the numbers of UAMs aging out of foster and into DP, and in particular, figures indicating whether former UAMs are accommodated within the regional proximity of their former foster

home. Additionally, the author failed locate any statistical information regarding the length of time former UAMs spend on average in DP after aging out. This all points to reason that there are a number of areas where necessary quantitative research must be carried out.

5.5 Final Reflections

On a reflective note, it has been quite an interesting journey becoming equated with my chosen topic of research. In the process, there has also been a great deal of personal learning. As primary research involves engaging with people you are in evidently working with one of the most unpredictable variables of all. Indeed, I met a number of hurdles along the way, particularly in terms of finding suitable participants, and also a lot of surprises in relation to the themes emerging from those I interviewed. In light of this I had to flexible, open and willing to move in a different direction than previously anticipated.

Although, I recognised in chapter 3 that research is never truly bias free, secretly I thought that I had the skills to be strongly objective letting the data emerge by itself, whereby I take the role as the curious researcher with no agenda to prove. My naivety was highlighted when I interviewed Respondent 1, who discussed being content moving into DP. Here, I recognised that I came with a strong agenda to problematize DP as a form of aftercare. In honesty, I really struggled with what he said, and wanted to omit it from my findings. This in turn, led to discovery that when carrying out primary research one must be ready to let go – let go of both the outcome and partially the process. Here, there was also learning in regards the importance of being true to presenting what emerged in the interview, and thus work in way that reflects integrity – the participant has generously offered you their time and their voice so respect that.

This also served as an eye opener in relation to complexity of what I was trying to understand. From here, a process followed which involved assessing and reassessing the data, and asking myself "what is the common tread weaving through this data, and how does it relate to the values and principles of social work practice?" From this, it became clear that what was most pronounced was the importance of relationship – offering service users a trustworthy, supportive and respectful relationship.

Also, at times I wondered whether the finding arising reflect my positionality more than the respondents? When both respondents mentioned faith, I was quick to probe deeper and see if it linked with the theme of resilience. On reflection perhaps this illustrates more my views. Through another researcher would the same theme have emerged? - I am not too sure. This again points to my ongoing struggle to remain impartial.

On bringing this project to a close, and thus, moving from the domain of student to professional what I would like to take with me is an understanding in relation to the impact

poor practice has on those receiving it. Like myself, I am sure all professionals discussed graduated with an aspiration to work in a liberating and just way. Realising this, I understand that there is potential for me too to become what I criticise. In many ways, I feel that acknowledging this is the first preventative step in avoiding its occurrence, and the second being, to ensure that critical reflection becomes embedded in my practice. However the onus is not merely on the individuals, agencies must effectively support staff through quality supervision, reasonable caseloads and appropriate training.

5.7 Conclusion

This collaborative research project sought to explore the experiences of UAMs as they transition from foster care into DP. This final chapter summarised the subsequent findings and from here, made a number of recommendation involving change at the political and practical level. Areas for future research were further highlighted, and a final reflection was also included the capture the author's research journey. It is hoped that this research will assist in Nasc in their on-going campaign for change that reflect equality and respects every individual's fundamental human rights.

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APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

This consent form is designed with qualitative research in mind. Where quantitative methods are used, issues such as quotations and audio-recording do not arise.

I……agree to participate in Denise Healy's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Denise Healy to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed: …… Date: ……..

PRINT NAME: ……

APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION SHEET



Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for my Master in Social Work at UCC, I have to complete a research project. This study seeks to explore the lived experience of transitioning from foster care into Direct Provision (DP), from the perspective of the young people involved. The study will focus on getting an understanding of what it was like to anticipate this move, and also transition into DP by inviting people who have direct experience to give their recollections of such events.

What will the study involve? The study will involve carrying out interviews with individual who entered Ireland as unaccompanied minors (UAM) and came into foster care, and from here, transitioned into DP on turning 18. It is anticipated that the interview will last between 45-60 min. Through interviewing you, I hoped to achieve a better understanding in relation to: 1) What it was like to anticipate moving from the care system into DP as you approached your 18th birthday. 2) What the experience of transitioning into DP was like for you after turning 18. 3) I would also like to hear from you about potential services and supports that you consider may have been beneficial during this period of your life

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you have experience arriving into Ireland as an unaccompanied minor and being placed into a foster home. You have also experienced transitioning into Direct Provision once reaching the age of eighteen years.

Do you have to take part? Participation is voluntary and this information sheet provided states the intended purpose behind the research. You have the right to withdraw at any stage while the research is carried up and also up to two weeks after participation. Withdrawal is acceptable even in the event that you have already signed a consent form (which you are to keep a signed copy of). Additionally, no identifying information will be included in the research outputs.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the dissertation and any published documents thereafter. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the dissertation will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give? Interviews will be recorded on a Dictaphone and deleted one transcribed using fictitious names. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. It

will be securely stored on a secure server under a coded file. Any physical data (paper files) will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded on completion. All data will be kept for 10 years before it is destroyed in line with UCC data storage requirements. It will only be used for the purposes of this research study and as described in the participant information sheets

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in my dissertation. They will be seen by my supervisor, the NASC Agency contact person, a second marker and the external examiner. The dissertation may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal, on the NASC webpage, or used by NASC for further advocacy purposes. The findings will also be discussed at the Annual Masters in Social Worker Research Conference.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? It is possible that talking about your experience in this way may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the procedure, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. I have also attached a list of support organizations to this sheet as a source of reference in case you feel in anyway distressed or anxious after completing this interview. Further support can also be accessed through Jennifer De Wan at the Nasc office. Her details are as follows:

Telephone: 021 450 3462

Email: jennifer@nascireland.org

Who has reviewed this study? This study has been reviewed and approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC and NASC.

Any further queries - If you need any further information, you can contact me: Denise Healy, Tel -087-7086630 or Email – 113738471@umail.ucc.ie

APPENDIX 3: SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



1. Can you tell me about your experience coming into the Foster Care System?

Prompts: who spoke to you about what was happening?; Did anyone speak to you about your rights; Did you know how long you would be in Foster Care?; Tell me a bit about the foster care environment; any particular emotions you would associate with this period of time?

2. Did you understand that going into foster care did not mean you had achieved asylum?

Prompts: What was your understanding about the immigration and legal system in Ireland?; Who advised you about it?; Did you feel well informed?

3. When did you apply for Asylum?

4. When did you find out you were going into Direct Provision?

Prompts: Who told you?; Were you asked for your opinion about the changes occurring?; How were you prepared?; Do you remember how you felt about anticipating this change?; What did you hope would happen when you turned 18?

5. Can you tell me about your interactions with social workers during the time in Foster Care and when you moved into DP

Prompts: How often did you meet?; What was discussed?; How many social workers did you engage with?

6. Can you tell me about your After Care Plan?

Prompts: What kind of plans were put in place for you?; Did you have an input in designing this plan?; Were you in school at the time – if so how did this transition influence your school life?

7. Can you tell be about what it was like for you to enter DP?

Prompts: Was there anything in particular you missed from your foster care home?; Did moving to DP influence the relationships you had formed when living in foster care?; Did you see a change in how you engaged with the wider community after you entered DP?; How do you feel about this period of your life?; Any particular emotions you would associate with your time in DP.

8. How long did you say in DP while waiting for Asylum?