

Supporting Youth Leaving Care

Current Aftercare Practices (CAP) in Karnataka

Aftercare is a continuum of care process towards social reintegration and mainstreaming, applicable to youth leaving care on attaining adulthood. Apart from India's ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), national policies, laws and schemes have been formulated in India with special provisions for care and protection for out-of-home-care (OHC) children and youth leaving care or Care Leavers. The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and Model Rules, 2016 and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, 2014 (ICPS) govern the provisioning of Aftercare services in Karnataka.

Research Overview

Udayan Care, with the support of UNICEF and Tata Trusts initiated a Current Aftercare Practices (CAP) research in Karnataka in 2018 with the aim of developing evidence-based programmes for Aftercare in the State. UNICEF Delhi, UNICEF State chapter in Karnataka and NIMHANS partnered with Udayan Care, providing support to the entire process of access to government, guidance on research methodology, data collection and improving the draft report for the State. The CAP study in Karnataka is a part of a multi-city research that examines:

- The nature of challenges and opportunities faced by Care Leavers
- The extent of existing Aftercare interventions
- The gaps and promising practices within the Aftercare ecosystem
- Recommendations to develop a robust Aftercare programme

The study was conducted with 108 care leavers as the primary stakeholders, and 14 government functionaries, private service providers, professionals and institutional duty-bearers as key-informants. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through:

- An indigenously developed questionnaire for Care Leavers
- In depth interviews conducted with care providers (Key Informants)
- Inception consultation with all stakeholders
- Secondary data through desk research, literature review and current intervention approach documentation

Sphere of Aftercare

Based on Udayan Care's several years of experience in service delivery, extensive secondary research, learnings from the pilot study, Udayan Care's research team developed a thematic framework that governs this study. This research puts forth the 'Sphere of Aftercare' as a comprehensive ideology of rehabilitative support and services for CLs transitioning out of care. The data has been analyzed in the backdrop of the 'Sphere of Aftercare' concept. The 'Sphere of Aftercare' framework divides the scope of Aftercare support/services into eight distinct, but interdependent domains that are essential for CLs' mainstreaming as they transition out of care. These domains are as mentioned in diagram:



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		
AGE	GENDER	AFTERCARE STATUS
18-21 years: 74 (69%)	Male: 47 (44%)	Receivers: 58 (54%)
22-25 years: 34 (31%)	Female: 61 (56%)	Non-receivers: 50 (46%)
CCI CATEGORY	NATURE OF AFTERCARE	MARITAL STATUS
Govt.: 61 (56%)	Govt.: 29 (50%)	Single: 93 (86%)
NGO: 47 (44%)	NGO: 29 (50%)	Married: 14 (13%)
EDUCATION		
Primary School: 4 (~4%)	Class XII pass: 29 (~27%)	Post-Graduation & Above: 11 (~10%)
Class V – X: 29 (~27%)	Graduation/Diploma: 35 (~32%)	

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



LIFE IN CCI

- Average Age of Admission to CCI = approx. 12 years
- 52% reported being placed in two or more CCIs. A greater proportion of those who had been placed in multiple CCIs reported adverse life experiences
- Many Care Leavers (CLs) reported adverse experiences during their stay in CCI such as discontinuity in education (23%), feeling of disempowerment (26%), lack of career counselling/guidance (19%) etc.
- **46% were not consulted in Aftercare or rehabilitation planning, with a higher female skew**
- 53% received no guidance regarding monetary management
- 64% CLs from Government CCIs reported no guidance on household economics as opposed to 38% CLs from NGO CCIs
- **84% never attended a financial literacy workshop, or one-on-one consultation with a caregiver, staff, mentor or expert**
- **70% CLs had never received one-on-one career guidance nor attended any career-development workshop**
- 42% never received legal literacy training
- 31% do not have a bank account



SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN CCI

- Skills identified under 3 broad categories: Independent Living Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Job-readiness & Vocational Skills
- 47% CLs had not acquired some of these skills and fell in the 'unsatisfactory' or 'neutral' range of the Skill Development Index
- Unlike the gender differences observed in other domains, a greater proportion of male CLs (54%) reported that they had not acquired independent living skills as compared to female CLs (39%)
- **A significantly lesser proportion of Aftercare non-receivers (26%) reported satisfactory level of skill development vis-à-vis receivers (77%)**
- **31% CLs from Govt. CCIs reported a 'satisfactory' level of skill development in CCI vis-à-vis 81% CLs from NGO CCIs**
- Over 43% voiced the need for specific activities or trainings to acquire independent living skills

The extent of skills acquired during childhood in a CCI was found to be significantly correlated with almost all spheres of Aftercare

"CWCs are unable to do much more than release and / or restore Aftercare youth due to a paucity of resources." – Key Informant, Expert – Child Protection



ACADEMICS AND CAREER

- 31% had not completed higher secondary (Class XII)
- 28% were neither in education, employment or training (NEET) in keeping with the national average
- **Only 6% were enrolled in vocational/technical training**
- 49% CLs reported 'unsatisfactory' educational qualifications, vocational skills level and felt inadequacy in achieving their academic or career goals
- A larger proportion of Aftercare receivers were pursuing higher education, as well as engaged in salaried jobs as compared to non-receivers
- **More than half of all male CLs were pursuing higher education as opposed to a third of female CLs**
- **25% female CLs reported having no educational/employment engagement as opposed to 4% of male CLs**
- **83% reported the need for assistance in completing their higher education**
- 59% reported the need for vocational and job readiness skill development through career counselling and training
- 54% of all CLs voiced the need for training in vocational skills

"Focus should be on vocational training wherein they are independent within 6 months to one year. All CCI youth should go through a Personal Enhancement Programme, where they are taught life skills." – KI, Expert – Child Protection



IDENTITY AND LEGAL AWARENESS

- **95% CLs reported having an Aadhar card**
- **A greater proportion of CLs (46%) from Govt. CCIs possessed Voters' ID as compared to (19%) CLs from NGO CCIs**
- A lesser proportion of female CLs had documents such as domicile certificate/proof of residence, ration card, PAN card and passport as compared to male CLs
- A greater proportion of CLs (69%) from Govt. CCIs reported satisfactory level of identity and legal awareness as compared to CLs from NGO CCIs (28%)

"One of the most important things to keep in mind is that [CLs] definitely need help in establishing their identity (Aadhar card, Voters' ID, caste certificate, etc.) There has to be clarity about who is going to help them in procuring this and how will they do it" – KI, Consultant, Department of Women and Child Development - Karnataka

TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE



HOUSING

- **No dedicated Aftercare facility for Female CLs in the state**
- 35% CLs were living in housing that was supported by their CCI/Aftercare programme, with a higher female skew
- **65% lived without any housing support from any CCI/Aftercare Program, of which 1 female also reported living in a homeless shelter**
- 12% of female CLs reported limited or no access to various housing amenities vis-à-vis 2% males
- 61% reported the need for assistance in finding adequate housing

“Aftercare cannot be limited to services provided ‘after’ the child/youth leaves the JJ system – the preparation for life ‘after’ the JJ system has to begin while the child/youth is in the system itself.”- KI, Member, Juvenile Justice Board - Bangalore



MENTAL HEALTH

- Almost 1 in every 6 CLs reported multiple symptoms of psychological disorders, with a female skew
- 38% did not seek any assistance for mental health concerns
- 36% reported that although they had someone who could provide care during illnesses, they could not rely on them for more than a few days
- **None of the CLs thought that other children from the CCIs were reliable in times of need indicating a serious lack of peer relationship development in the CCIs**
- A greater proportion of CLs (90%) from Govt. CCIs reported ‘satisfactory’ emotional health as compared to CLs from NGO CCIs (77%)
- **It is also noteworthy that none of the key informants had any opinion regarding CLs mental health**
- All Care Leavers struggle equally in forging friendships and maintaining romantic relationships BUT most CLs reported ‘satisfactory’ mental health: Could this be an inability to recognize symptoms? Complacency with their current situation? Does stigma reduce reporting of emotional distress?
- The lack of clear reasons indicates that further research into the stresses faced by CLs, their coping mechanism, and availability of appropriate care through a gender-sensitive approach is necessary
- 18% reported that averting monetary crisis had taken precedence over pursuing their goals
- **32% received no information regarding their legal rights and responsibilities**



FINANCIAL SECURITY

- Only 32% respondents reported independent sources of income
- 40% males reported having their own sources of income vis-a-vis 25% females
- **74% Aftercare receivers reported having no independent sources of income vis-a-vis 64% Aftercare non-receivers**
- 50% reported that they had no financial support whatsoever. They relied on others or their Aftercare programme to fulfil their needs
- Mean income of independent earners (Rs.8709 pm) is lower than the state minimum wages for unskilled workers in most industries
- **61% reported that their income/allowance was unable to cover their cost of living.** 16% do not have funds available to them in case of illness
- 37% were not actively saving
- 50% reported ‘unsatisfactory’ level of financial literacy, poor financial security and frequent monetary crisis
- 57% reported the need for training/guidance to achieve financial independence



SOCIAL INTEGRATION

- **Almost 1 in every 3 CLs reported that they were unable to maintain meaningful or long-lasting relationships with CCI staff & caregivers**
- **Almost 70% were unable to do so even with their mentors and peers**
- A large proportion of Aftercare receivers (40%) reported the ‘satisfactory’ acquisition of interpersonal skills and the ability to maintain relationships as compared to non-receivers (10%)
- **64% female CLs were unable to maintain relationships with their biological families vis-à-vis 43% male CLs. However, the reasons for this remain unclear and further research is required to ascertain how many male and female CLs were true orphans, had single parents or had been abandoned by their families along with reasons for their dissociation from families**
- 88% reported difficulties in maintaining romantic relationships
- 54% thought that Aftercare services should be provided in-person through a physical facility/office
- 59% shared that they did not have any formal or informal group or alumni association for peer support. 70% reported that they would like to contribute and benefit from such a youth collective
- 62% voiced the need for guidance or counselling to improve the quality of their relationships and establish a social support network
- To improve their social skills, about 50% of all CLs voiced the need for soft-skills training; however, the remaining 50% thought that they did not require any such training as their skills are adequate, even though 74% of all CLs reported inability to maintain relationships and not having acquired certain social skills
- “Arriving at a definition of Aftercare is an uphill task in our system because of the dynamic nature – children live in CCI and regularly visit families, children truly orphan and no family connection, etc – all sets have different needs. A good Aftercare means instilling coping mechanisms and continued support.” – KI, Child Protection Specialist - UNICEF

ADULT OUTCOMES

Aftercare Quality Index

The provision of Aftercare Support and Services has an impact on overall outcomes in all domains in Adulthood. A composite score, comprising of the following 8 indices, was computed to give the Aftercare Quality Index: Housing Index, Independent Living Skills Index, Social Support and Interpersonal Skills Index, Emotional Wellbeing Index, Physical Healthcare Index, Financial Index, Academics and Career Skills Index, Legal Index.

- A greater proportion of Aftercare receivers (66%) had a better Aftercare Quality Index than non-receivers (32%)
- CCI Life Experience Index as well as CCI Skill Development Index was found to have a positive correlation with the Aftercare Quality Index. (Pearson correlation coefficient significant at alpha level = 0.01)
- It was found a greater proportion of male CLs had better Aftercare Quality Index than their female counterparts. This implies that the care and Aftercare received by males in our sample is more conducive to their social reintegration than the care and Aftercare received by females
- A greater proportion of CLs from NGO CCIs had a better Aftercare Quality Index than CLs from Government CCIs
- Better educational qualifications, job readiness and vocational skills indicate better quality of life across all Spheres of Aftercare

These findings are crucial to our understanding of Aftercare as they support the ideology of a continuum of care, where experiences, values, knowledge and skills accumulated in care and Aftercare have a direct and profound impact on experiences and outcomes in adult life.

Discussion Points

1. Reducing the risk of social, legal, economic exclusion of Care Leavers
2. Increasing enrolment of Care Leavers in vocational and skills training, particularly females
3. Creating career opportunities commensurate with educational input
4. Quality of relationships and its effect on emotional well-being of Care Leavers
5. Achieving convergence of various government schemes benefitting Care Leavers



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