

Understanding Social Reintegration: The Perspective of Out-Of-Care Orphaned Young Adults of Mumbai, India

ABSTRACT

Social reintegration in literal sense connotes 'going back to the society'. In Indian context of child care institutions (CCIs), it is understood as a process where children or young adults (hereafter referred as care leavers) are prepared to leave their formal care and join the mainstream of the society as an independent individual. But in practice how well the system of CCIs is functioning? This question emerges as most of the care leavers lack the means (stable source of income, educational qualification, employable skills, guidance, family and any other social support) to access a decent standard of living and are pushed towards a challenging life. Therefore, for a better understanding of the situation and for planning any intervention it is essential to know how the care leavers perceived that experience? What social reintegration means to them and how their overall experience influences that meaning? For gaining a comprehensive understanding of these questions, a qualitative design was adopted, and 13 case studies were prepared. The case studies were based upon the retrospective insights shared by orphan young adults (of 24 – 28 years, who had lived in multiple CCI's and were living independently during the study) into their institutional and aftercare experiences and its relation to the social reintegration. The qualitative analysis constructed three themes, i.e. 'Experiencing Care', 'Transitioning from 'Care' to 'Out-of-Care': The Journey Therein' and 'Moving into 'Mainstream Society': Context and Challenges'. Key findings underscore that promoting a family like environment, presence of a guiding figure, planned transition, shared decision making, continuum of care and networking among peers can result in better perception of social reintegration among the care leavers. Based on the discussion and minute details of these themes nuances of social reintegration were understood. A set of very specific recommendations were made for the caregivers, the child care institutions and the policy framework for bringing effective change in the existing child care system.

Keywords: Social reintegration, child care institutions, orphan children, institutional care, caregiving