



Care Leavers: 10 Years On A Narrative Rapid Review

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Background

International literature has demonstrated both the strengths of care experienced young people and adults and the marginalisation and disadvantage that they may face on their journeys through and out of the care system. Much of this literature has focused on young people in care, or on the leaving care transition, and not enough is known about the implications of care experiences as adult lives unfold over time, and the factors, events and experiences that influence differing trajectories and outcomes. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) has commissioned a study that, for the first time in Ireland, addresses this critical knowledge gap: generating robust, in-depth evidence about the lives of those who have left care and transitioned to adulthood in the Irish context, and specifically in the aftermath of the Ryan Report (2009).

This narrative rapid review has been conducted to inform the scope and design of that new research study¹, entitled 'Care Leavers – 10 Years On'. Spanning Irish and international literature, the review has been designed to capture and synthesise learning from relevant studies involving care experienced adults aged 25 and above. The aims of the review were both substantive and methodological:

1. To document key learning *and* gaps in the international knowledge base; the review was designed to inform the identification of core topics for exploration with research participants (care experienced people and nominated adults in their networks).
2. Drawing on this existing research, we sought to inform the methodological approach used for planned qualitative research with care experienced adults, and particularly, to highlight critical ethical and methodological considerations for the research design and implementation.
3. Finally, an aligned aim of the review was to derive wider messages from the research that could be of value for research, policy and practice development in the field, both in Ireland and internationally.

¹ The research is part of a wider programme of work being conducted by DCEDIY – [the Care Experiences Programme](#). This programme of work includes a complementary review of Irish research on children in care and young adults leaving care (DCEDIY, 2023) – available [here](#) (accessed 13/1/25).

Search Strategy

The approach to the narrative rapid review was deliberately inclusive and flexible, framed by a broad research question as follows:

What are the outcomes and experiences of care-experienced adults aged 25 years or more?

This twofold focus on outcomes and experiences reflects the need for a differentiated analysis of pathways through adult lives, recognising the distinctive and systemic challenges and forms of disadvantage that care experienced people may encounter, whilst challenging the reproduction of deficit-focused narratives that may exacerbate risk, contributing to negative stereotypes and undermining confidence and agency (e.g., Gilligan 2019; Bakketeig et al. 2020).

Following Dobbins (2017), we developed a search strategy for identifying evidence to help us to answer the underpinning research question, with pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix 1). Given the time constraints for the overall project, and in keeping with a rapid review approach (Grant & Booth, 2009), searches were focused on a single key database, *Web of Science*², but supplemented by input from the research team to incorporate known omissions as searches progressed.

In the first instance, four research concepts and associated search terms were developed:

Research concept #1 was “Care Experienced Adults”. Terms related to this concept were identified to capture as many variations of this term as possible and included the following terms “care experienced adults”, “adult care leavers”, and “care experienced person”.

² Decided following consultation with the Subject Librarian for the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

Research concept #2 concerned “care context” and sought to reflect the many different placement types and settings that a young person might live in when placed in alternative care. Terms used in this concept included “foster care”, “residential care”, “secure care”, “special care”, “kinship care”, “specialist residential care”, and “relative care”.

Research concept #3 was focused on “experiences” and included terms such as experience*, views*, perceptions, attitude*, beliefs, and involvement.

Research concept #4 was “outcomes” and sought to draw in sources focused on this aspect of the care experience. Terms used in this concept included outcome, end result, consequences, and effect.

The first round of searching on *Web of Science*, using these four concepts, yielded 102 results. On review of these sources, it was apparent that – while many papers identified were relevant to the research question, a considerable number of key articles/outputs that were known to the research team had not been picked up by the search terms being used. Accordingly, search terms were reviewed, and a fifth research concept was then added that was concerned with various *domains* of experience. This concept included terms such as health, disability, special educational needs, illness, education, family, and parenthood.

When the first research concept (related to “care experienced adults”) was combined with the fifth research concept (related to “domains of experience”) search results were overwhelmingly relevant to the research question and it was decided, that in the interest of focus and time, these combined search terms would be the sole research concepts used. **A total of 195 sources were identified** using these two concepts in *Web of Science*. A screening process was then completed guided by the following additional exclusion criteria:

1. Papers published before 2014 were excluded unless they had high topic relevance³;
2. Paper with a sample outside age range 25-40 were excluded unless they had a high topic relevance;
3. Papers not focused on high / middle income countries were excluded unless the focus of the paper was highly relevant. This decision was made in an effort to ensure that the study context in the literature reviewed was as similar as possible to the Irish setting.

As these criteria make clear, relevance to the focus of the review was of central importance, in line with the aims of this targeted narrative rapid review. Where there was potential ambiguity or subjective judgement (e.g., on topic relevance) exclusions were discussed by the first authors of this review (EB/JB) before a decision was made. Following this screening process, 43 papers were excluded. The remaining sources (n=152) were then combined with the screened results from the initial search that included the original four research concepts (n=30). When duplicates were removed, there were 159 papers left for review. This formal search process was supplemented by the research team's expert knowledge of this topic area and 16 additional sources that had not been captured in the formal search were included in the **final dataset of 175 sources**.

In the narrative review that follows here, we also draw on wider literature on young adulthoods – particularly, research in youth studies, and addressing relevant related topics such as young parenthood, housing, employment and health – to illuminate gaps in the literature on care experienced adult lives. It was beyond the scope of this narrative rapid review to incorporate a systematic search of this wider literature, and so we utilise this material through our knowledge of the field as a multi-disciplinary team.

³ Relevance was defined in relation to the core aims of the current study. Hence, for example, publications specifically focused on care experienced people aged 25 and over were retained. Studies excluded due to low topic relevance included: topics beyond the scope of the current study (e.g., biogenetic research; research on elder care); studies focused on specific intervention outcomes (e.g., evaluation of a therapeutic programme); and service-focused studies in very different country contexts (e.g., transitions from orphanage care in India).

Overview of Sources

Date ranges: The final set of sources (including peer reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, and reports) were published between 1996 and 2024 with the majority published after 2012.

Geographic location: Research from a range of countries in both the Global North and the Global South is represented in the final dataset including six multi-nation studies that present data from between five and 16 countries. Appendix 2 provides a full list of countries covered by the included papers; the most commonly represented were the UK and Israel. Of the 175 papers, 11 included Ireland. Cross-national analysis of these diverse national care contexts is beyond the scope of this rapid review. Nevertheless, given the international range of material included, it is important to recognise that the countries included in the review vary in relation to legal frameworks, approaches to provision and statutory support entitlements for children and young people in care and care leavers, as well as in their wider population and welfare contexts for childhood, youth, family and early adulthoods⁴.

Methodology: There were 14 literature reviews of different kinds (e.g., scoping or systematic reviews). A qualitative approach was reported in 99 sources; this included semi-structured interviews (reported most often), biographically focused interviews, and focus groups. A quantitative approach was used in 22 sources while mixed methods were reported in 31 sources. Three papers were based on documentary analysis, five were discussion papers, and one was a feasibility study.

Study populations: Most studies reported samples that included those aged over 25 *as well as* younger participants⁵, and for the most part, the analysis presented did not separate the experiences of older participants. Only 13⁶ of the 175 sources reported exclusively on research regarding care experienced adults aged 25 and

⁴ For discussion of relevant cross-national considerations, see for example Burns et al. (2017); Boddy et al. (2019); Whittaker et al. (2023); Keller et al. (2024).

⁵ For example, Gilligan and colleagues' (2022) study reported on the experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic among care leavers in Ireland aged 18-27.

⁶ This figure includes one longitudinal study reporting specifically on findings related to care leavers aged over 25.

above (Cameron et al., 2018; Crous et al., 2021; Fernandez et al., 2019; Frantsman-Spector & Shoshana, 2021; Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Gabriel et al., 2021; Grotowska-Leder & Kudlińska-Chróścicka et al., 2021; Jensen, 2021; Keshri, 2021; Martin et al., 2023; Refaeli et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2022; Zeira et al., 2014). This relative emphasis is striking, and in itself provides evidence that the current study, Care Leavers 10 Years On, is addressing a significant gap in knowledge internationally, as well in the Irish context.

Key findings

In accordance with the ethical, methodological and substantive aims of this narrative rapid review, our analysis of the final set of articles was organised in relation to four core questions, as follows:

1. What substantive topics and domains of experience or outcome are addressed in the existing literature that are likely to be relevant for further investigation in the current study?
 - a. in the dataset of articles/outputs as a whole?
 - b. in research within the Irish context specifically?
2. What are the key findings of the literature that focuses specifically on care experienced adults aged 25 and above?
3. What gaps in understanding need to be addressed, in terms of significant aspects of young adults' lives that are not addressed in the identified literature on care experienced adulthoods?
4. What methodological and ethical learning from existing research needs to be considered in the research design and implementation of the current study?

1. Substantive domains of experience and outcome

Overview

In this section, we provide an overview of headline topics and issues addressed within the final set of 175 sources identified through the literature search process. The reviewed articles addressed a wide variety of experiences, including:

transitioning out of care; education and work pathways; negotiating relationships – particularly those with family members; and experiences of parenting as a care leaver. A series of studies focused on objective measures of outcomes of young adults who have left care.

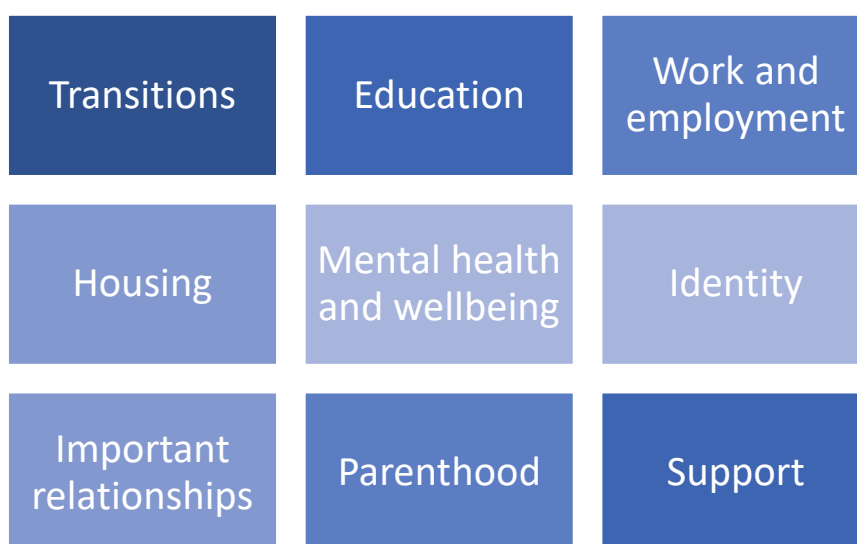
A significant minority of papers adopted a ‘long-term’ or holistic approach to examining the post care experiences of care leavers, for example, examining life satisfaction (Achdut et al., 2022; Cabrera et al., 2020; Mabile et al., 2022; Refaeli et al., 2019) and life outcomes (Artamonova et al., 2020; Cameron et al., 2018; Fernandez et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2023; Mullan, 2022; Syme & Hill, 2017). A subset of these papers considered broader lived experiences post-care (Diraditsile & Nyadza, 2018; Ibrahim & Howe, 2011) and life stories / biographies of care leavers (Frantsman-Spector & Shoshana, 2023; Gabriel et al., 2021; Grotowska-Leder & Kudlińska-Chróścicka, 2021). In addition to this, a selection of papers drawing on data gathered as part of a qualitative longitudinal study of 75 young adults (aged 16-32 years) with care experience in Denmark, England, and Norway sought to broaden our conceptualisation of ‘outcomes’ in the context of care leaving to recognise the ‘complex, dynamic, relationality of doing well’ (Bakketeig et al., 2020, p1). A further paper drawing on this dataset emphasises the ‘importance of developing socially and culturally located biographical accounts of ‘transition’ that recognise the complexities, uncertainties and essential interdependence of everyday lives and emerging adulthood’ (Boddy et al., 2020: 291). These points are arguably highly relevant in the context of the current study concerned with the long-term experiences of young adults who left care 10 years ago.

By contrast, however, a majority of the identified literature related to care experience has tended to focus on a particular domain (e.g. education, work, or housing) in any given paper, while relatively few articles looked at outcomes or experiences more holistically. This may relate at least in part to the constraints and expectations of funding and publishing processes; for example, some domain-focused papers were borne of wider studies that were noted within the relevant paper, and different domains of experience were reported separately. Many studies were also focused on risk of poor outcomes as opposed to broader life experience. These domain-specific outputs are discussed below, but considered as a whole this tendency in the

literature indicates the value of the current study adopting an holistic approach to understanding the lives and long-term support needs of care experienced adults, recognising the ways in which different domains of experience may intersect over time.

The most common focus of the papers / sources identified was on some aspect of the transition out of care (n=42), while other papers / sources were focused on additional domains of life after care, including education (n=26), but also mental health and wellbeing (n=14), identity (n=11) housing (n=9) and parenthood (n=9). Figure 1 provides an overview of substantive domains covered within the literature. These are discussed in turn below.

Figure 1: Substantive domains covered within the identified literature.



Transitions (n=42)

Transition from care

The issue of transitions came up across multiple papers – these related to both transitions from care and wider ‘normative’ transition issues. Reflecting the breadth of age ranges covered in the research reviewed here, preparation for leaving care and aftercare services are discussed in some papers as a facet of transitions out of care. However, given our specific focus on life beyond 25 years of age, experiences of aftercare services and support are not specifically drawn out of the review as a

separate topic. Many of the reviewed papers addressed facets of the transition out of care, such as: barriers and facilitators within this process (Sulimani-Aidan, 2020; Sulimani-Aidan 2017); subjective experiences of transitioning out of care (Dumaret et al., 2011; Frimpong-Manso, 2020; Leal-Ferman et al., 2022); experiences of care leavers with disabilities (Bennwik & Oterholm, 2021; Broadley, 2015; Priestley et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2018); consideration of the emotional work that care leavers perform when transitioning to adulthood (Østergaard, 2023); and specific experiences of female care leavers (Takele et al., 2020). Munro and colleagues (2022) report on the particular experience of transitioning out of care and into adulthood during the Covid-19 pandemic in England.

Disability and the Transition from Care

Four identified papers considered aspects of the transition from care in the context of young people with disabilities. A Norwegian study (Bennwik & Oterholm, 2021) drew on documentary analysis to explore the values underpinning policies in relation to transition experiences for care leavers with disabilities. Based on analysis of documents in the field of disability and child welfare services in Norway, the authors noted that care leavers were not identified as a target group for support in policies from either field. An earlier Australian study (Broadley, 2015) examined the potential role of adult protection services in the lives of young people with disabilities transitioning out of care, based on perspectives from 21 professionals working in disability and out of home care services. This study concluded that care leavers with disabilities did not receive the transitional and post-care support and housing they need – a finding that resonates with Bennwik and Oterholm's (2021) observations about the absence of disabled care leavers being identified as a target group for support.

In 2003, Priestley and colleagues considered the issue of transitioning from care and the experience of young people with disabilities in England and Wales. Drawing on examples from a qualitative research project with young people with disabilities in an English Local Authority, they note that key issues such as accommodation, friendship, family involvement, education, employment, and parenthood 'carry additional significance' for young people with disabilities and should therefore, arguably, be given additional consideration in the context of a young person with a

disability leaving care. Roberts et al. (2018) scoped existing literature and interviewed four young people with disabilities who were also leaving the English care system. Their findings point to issues around exploitation regarding housing and finances and experiences of difficulty accessing services among young people leaving care who also had a disability. While conducted 15 years apart, both Priestley et al. (2003) and Roberts et al. (2018) concluded that the perspectives and experiences of leaving the care system among disabled young people are frequently underrepresented in the literature.

Transitions to Adulthoods

While the aforementioned papers were focused on the *transition from care*, there were several papers that examined wider transitions to adulthoods among care leavers (e.g. Haggman-Laitila et al., 2018; Sulimani-Aidan, 2020). Atkinson and Hyde's (2019) review considered the issue of barriers and facilitators within this transition experience, while Bizzi and colleagues (2024) examined the experience of Italian care leavers when transitioning to adulthood. Dima and BuCuta (2015) addressed support needs when transitioning from care to adulthood among care leavers in Romania. Boddy et al. (2020) drew on data gathered as part of a qualitative longitudinal study of young adults from Norway, Denmark, and England to examine the ways in which wider welfare systems interact with informal networks as young people navigate transitions in early adulthoods.

The distinction between examining the transition from care and transitions in young adulthoods is important to consider in the context of the current Irish study – as is the emphasis in much of the reviewed research on the transition *from* care. Boddy et al. (2020) drew on youth studies literature (e.g., Thomson et al. 2002) that disputes discourses of individual linear transition to a uniform 'adulthood', arguing instead for attention to emerging *adulthoods* (plural) and the multiple complex temporalities of diverse everyday lives and identities, intersecting with factors such as gender, ethnicity, migration status, family and community networks, and poverty – as well as care experience. These arguments are highly relevant to our present study, which aims to understand people's experiences over the ten years *since* transitioning from care – through early adulthoods over time.

Education (n=26)

As with the literature focused on transitions, several papers examined barriers and facilitators to educational attainment among care leavers (Burns & Cassidy, 2024; Frimpong-Manso, 2022; Jackson & Cameron, 2012; McNamara et al., 2019). Some of those examining education in the context of care experience focused specifically on issues related to accessing, and experiences of, higher education (Simpson & Murphy, 2022; Horn, 2019; Ellis & Johnston, 2024). The majority of papers in this domain however, focused on aspects of participant educational pathways - including (but not confined to) pathways through higher education – and addressing diversity of pathways (Brady & Gilligan, 2019; Cameron et al. 2018; Groining & Sting, 2019; Hollingworth, 2012) and those factors that shaped pathways including agency (Brady & Gilligan, 2020a) and relationships / support (Brady & Gilligan, 2020b; Sting & Groining, 2020). Several studies also examined educational outcomes more specifically (Harrison et al., 2020; Okpych & Courtney, 2019; Zeira et al., 2014; Zeira et al., 2023).

Work and employment (n=8)

As with education, the small number of papers that focused on work and employment examined broader pathways and influences (Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan, 2015; 2020; Gilligan & Arnau-Sabates, 2017; Gobel et al., 2021; Johansson et al., 2023), while one study examined specific outcomes in this area (Zeira & Benbenishty, 2023). Drawing on findings from their study of young people in Ireland (n=10) and Catalonia (n=12) Arnau-Sabates and Gilligan (2015) examined the range of influences on entry and progress in the world of work among care leavers aged 22-33. These included relations with employers and colleagues and their educational experiences. Further analysis of this data set considered the specific influence of carers (Gilligan & Arnau-Sabates, 2017) and bosses and co-workers in this domain (Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan, 2020).

Housing (n=9)

A relatively small number of papers focused specifically on housing and accommodation experiences. Literature related to this topic considered the issue from multiple angles including experiences of independent living and transitional housing (Keshri, 2023; Palmer et al., 2022; Tayri & Spiro, 2023); experiences of

accessing housing more generally (Glynn & Mayock, 2023; Mendes et al., 2023); housing pathways (Natalier & Johnson, 2012); and perceptions of home (Natalier & Johnson, 2015).

Irish research on youth homelessness by Mayock and colleagues has also addressed the sequelae of care experience. Mayock et al. (2021) explored how, for some young people, family-related turning points – such as parental separation, bereavement, and family conflict – play a critical role in the pathways that lead youth into homelessness, particularly following their exit from the care system. Mayock and Parker (2017, 2019) highlighted the challenges care experienced adults can face in securing stable housing, emphasising how barriers in the housing market and inadequate service support lead to prolonged homelessness and housing instability, with many resorting to informal or precarious living arrangements to avoid returning to homeless services.

Mental health and wellbeing (n=14)

The search identified a cluster of papers focused on various aspects of mental health and wellbeing. Some were psychologically focused, for example, examining issues such as psychosocial outcomes, mental health symptoms (Berlin et al., 2011; Toivonen et al., 2020), adjustment (Gullo et al., 2023), suicidal ideation (Gobbels-Kock, 2023), substance use (Kind et al., 2023), and health behaviours (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2020). Broader mental health and wellbeing needs were also captured in some research (e.g., Sims-Schouten & Hayden, 2017).

Three studies in the mental health and wellbeing cluster considered the lived experiences of care leavers during the Covid-19 pandemic (Dadswell & O'Brien, 2022; Gilligan et al., 2022; Kelly et al., 2021), providing learning that is potentially relevant to participants in our current study, who have spent a significant period in their young adult lives living with the impacts of the Covid pandemic.

Grouped here under mental health and wellbeing, two studies also examined the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of care experienced young people (Quarmby et al., 2021; Sandford et al., 2023). These studies also focused on experiences during Covid and the role of physical activity. Both sought to ascertain young

people's perspectives on these issues – an approach that was less common in the literature on the broad topic of mental health and wellbeing. Overall, there is a noticeable gap in the literature identified regarding research on physical health among adults with care experience.

Identity (n=11)

Arguably related to many other domains including wellbeing, the topic of 'identity' was addressed in various papers in differing ways. It is important to recognise that the concept of 'identity' may be understood in differing ways and applied in different ways – a point which is evident in the range of papers where this issue was addressed. These included consideration of aspects of identity development and management (Colbridge et al., 2017; Evans, 2019; Molholt, 2021; Schofield et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2011; Ward et al., 2017) as well as examination of related issues such as experiences of labelling or stereotyping (Gwenzi & Ringson, 2023), retrospective views on being a 'child at risk' (Frantsman-Spector & Shoshana, 2021), motivations for helping others (Melkman et al., 2015). Identity also intersects with other core domains including concepts of 'family' (see below) and 'home', particularly complex for care leavers with experiences of homelessness (Mayock and Parker, 2020).

Important relationships (n=9)

An additional group of papers considered experiences of navigating relationships – in particular those related to *family*. These studies addressed issues including meanings and narratives of family and family practices (Boddy 2019; Boddy et al., 2020, 2023; Gwenzi et al., 2020; 2023; Parker & Mayock, 2019; Edwards and Canning 2024). Havlicek (2021) reported on findings of a systematic review of birth parent-foster youth relationships both before and after leaving care. Considered as a whole, this body of research indicates that care experienced adults are likely to be in contact with birth parents (most commonly, mothers) and wider networks of biological kin, whilst noting that relationships with birth parents continue to be complex and challenging for many young adults. Havlicek's (2021) review focused on young people with experience of foster care, noting evidence that a significant proportion were in contact with birth parents, but cautioning that there is a lack of evidence on exchange of support of different kinds between birth parents and young adults, or

about the risks and quality of their relationships. These questions were addressed in Boddy's (2023) analysis, based on two studies that together involved qualitative longitudinal interviews with 35 care experienced adults in England; the work documented complex interdependencies in support between young adults and their birth parents, relating to financial support, housing insecurity and support with wider relationships (e.g., romantic partners) as well as provision of care for parents with complex health/support needs.

Within childhood and youth studies, and within studies of care experience, scholars have critiqued the tendency of researchers and theorists to neglect the significance of *intra-generational*, and particularly sibling, relationships (e.g., Monk & McVarish 2018; Punch 2020; Gulløv & Winther 2021). As indicated above, most research on relationships with family has focused on inter-generational relationships – particularly with birth parents – although Boddy's (2023) analysis highlights the importance of attention to sibling relationships, which can provide a key source of support for care experienced adults but which may also entail complex tensions and caring responsibilities (e.g., for younger siblings).

Additional work regarding the relevance of *friendship* in the context of care experience was also identified as part of this review (Roesch-Marsh & Emond, 2020); Boddy (2023) also addresses friendship and romantic relationships in relation to the conceptualisation of chosen family, but it is apparent from our analysis that friend and peer relationships remain a neglected topic in research with care experienced adults.

Parenthood (n=9)

Several publications (all since 2017) have considered experiences of parenting in the context of having been in care oneself as a child. These have examined experiences related to encountering the child protection system as young mothers (Blaxland et al., 2022); experiences of motherhood in particular (Coler, 2018; Frimpong et al., 2022; Zhukova, 2020); experiences of parenting more broadly (Creswell, 2019; Refaeli et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2017a; 2017b) and experiences of parenting in the context of homelessness (Mayock and Parker, 2017). Roberts addresses this domain in her 2021 book based on research examining the experiences and support

needs of young parents in and leaving care in Wales; Boddy's (2023) book includes a chapter on care experienced parenthood, drawing in part on research conducted with women who have experienced child removal into care or adoption. While this literature addresses 'parenthood' in the context of care experience, the focus has predominantly been on the experiences of mothers in particular. This tendency is apparent in research on child welfare (see Philip et al. 2020 for a notable exception), and is mirrored in the wider literature on families, where the experience of fathers is under-researched, and often framed through a risk- or problem-focused lens (for a discussion, see Tarrant 2021; Hughes & Tarrant 2023)

Support (n=7)

The concept of support is addressed in many of the publications discussed in this review, in relation to the relevant domain or wider focus of the article. This is perhaps unsurprising given the importance of needing to understand care leavers' different support needs throughout their adult lives (Paulsen & Berg, 2016). Support is discussed in relation to education (Brady & Gilligan, 2020b), work (Gilligan & Arnau-Sabates, 2017), and in terms of scaffolding through critical moments of transition in relation to experiences of precarity in young adulthoods (Boddy et al. 2020).

However, a subset of seven papers focused specifically on aspects of support – arguably a central issue for understanding care experienced adulthoods – considering both support programmes for care leavers via integrative review (Haggman et al., 2020) and broader perspectives on, and experiences of, support among care leavers in Denmark (Cudjoe et al., 2022), Sweden (Hojer & Sjoblom, 2014), Israel (Melkman & Benbenishty, 2018), and South Africa (van Breda, 2022). Further to this work, Stubbs and colleagues (2023) report findings of their scoping review exploring how care leavers create and experience an informal support network which they note as being 'diverse, changeable, and tenuous in nature' (p. 31). A 2023 study examined the specific international policy and service responses to care leaving experiences and supports during the Covid-19 pandemic (Refaeli et al., 2023).

There were several topics that were addressed by a smaller number of papers – sometimes just one – that warrant mention given the range of topics they address. Issues considered in these papers include criminal justice involvement (Hunter et al.,

2024; Shook et al., 2011); language, literacy, and communication abilities (Clegg et al., 2021); experiences regarding accessing care records (Hoyle et al., 2020; Murray & Humphries, 2014); community engagement in the context of a community-based volunteering project in the United Kingdom (Cox et al., 2023) and participation in a socially prescribed community gardening group (Moore & Thew, 2023); involvement in research processes (Liabo, 2018; Pound & Sims-Schouten, 2022); and care leavers' perspectives on the aftercare planning process (Glynn and Mayock, 2019).

The Irish context

When researching issues related to the support needs of care experienced people into adulthood, it is necessary to attend to the connections between agency and structure in the layers of context that shape individual biographies (Brannen & Nilsen 2022); not least, child welfare and leaving care systems are situated within wider social, economic and cultural contexts that shape individual lives. With these considerations in mind, we include a brief section focusing specifically on recent care leaving literature in the Irish context. While some of the literature in this section was identified in the database search (and has been integrated in the above section), additional literature was identified and is integrated below based on the authors' collective knowledge of existing research in the Irish context.

The existing Irish literature related to care leavers has seen an increase in recent years and includes a longstanding body of work by the study team. As noted above, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (2023) also recently published an important literature review examining experiences of young children and young people in care and adults who left care in Ireland. Among the findings of this review the authors note research recruitment and researcher access issues and the need to gather and consider young people's views – both key issues in the context of the current study. Studies examining issues related to care leavers in Ireland (many of which were reported in the above DCEDIY review) have focused on various aspects of leaving care. One of the earliest studies of young people leaving care in Ireland was undertaken by Kelleher and colleagues in 2000. Since then, studies of various domains of life have been completed including education (Brady et al., 2019; Brady & Gilligan, 2019; 2020a; 2020b; Gilligan & Brady, 2023; Darmody et al., 2013); work (Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan, 2015; 2020; Gilligan &

Arnau-Sabates, 2017); transitions (Glynn & Mayock, 2019); post care needs (Daly, 2012); aftercare provision (Carr, 2014), housing (Palmer et al., 2022); permanence (Whiting, 2023); family relationships (Farragher, 2019; Parker and Mayock, 2019); sexual health and education (Hyde et al., 2016); experiences related to the Covid-19 pandemic (Gilligan et al., 2022); and broader issue of outcomes among care leavers (Dixon et al., 2018; Mullan, 2022). There has also been consideration of experiences among care leavers with disabilities (Erwin, 2023) and the use of the Direct Provision system as aftercare for separated children who ‘age out’ of care (Ni Raghallaigh & Thornton, 2017). The focus in many of these studies was on care leavers in the immediate years after leaving care (aged 18-24) however, some also included and / or focused on the experiences of ‘older’ care leavers (i.e. those over 25). For example, Brady (2020) and Brady and Gilligan’s (2019; 2020a; 2020b) work examined the educational pathways of adults aged 24-36 while Arnau-Sabates and Gilligan (2015; 2020) heard from care leavers aged 23-33 in Ireland and Catalonia regarding their experiences of entering the world of work. Both Whiting (2023) and Gilligan et al. (2022) included some ‘older’ stories in their work with samples aged 20-30 and 18-27 respectively. A forthcoming book chapter by members of the study team and colleague (Brady et al., IN PRESS) unpacks developments in relation to aftercare in Ireland in general with additional commentary about the research landscape in this area.

2. Care experienced adults aged 25 and above

Moving back to the international context, we now review literature concerned with care experienced adults aged over 25. The review indicates growing research interest in experiences beyond the years of leaving care transitions. Of the 13 studies that focused specifically on care experienced people aged over 25, all were published between 2014 and 2023. Eight studies drew on qualitative methods while one study used mixed methods, and four used quantitative methods. Studies were carried out in Australia (2), Britain (1 – as part of a cross national study), Denmark (1), Finland (1 – as part of a cross national study), Germany (1 – as part of a cross national study), Ghana (1), India (1), Israel (3), Poland (1), Spain (2), and Switzerland (1).

While some studies focused on the initial post-25 years (e.g. Cameron et al., 2018; Crouse et al., 2021), others considered the experiences of a wider range of ages (e.g. Fernandez et al., 2019; Jensen, 2021). Considering findings from the studies together, there is clear evidence that people who have been in care can face significant challenges over the long term; equally, this literature highlights positive learning, for example, documenting how young adults have cultivated support networks and positive relationships through the passage of time.

A sub-set of studies were concerned with the outcomes and impact of being in various types of care setting at varying points in later life. Gabriel and colleagues (2021) analysed 37 interviews with former residents of children's homes in Switzerland aged 25 to 85 to study the impact of childhood residential care on dimensions of adult well-being, for example, documenting how care experience can be associated with impacts later in life, for example on social networks and parenthood.

Cameron et al. (2018) examined long term outcomes across multiple domains (education, employment, family and social relationships, health, welfare) among care leavers aged 28-31 in Britain, Finland, and Germany using existing quantitative longitudinal data sets. Across all three countries, the analysis documented evidence of the continued disadvantage faced by care experienced people – similar to Zeira et al's (2014) findings regarding the educational outcomes of youth village alumni in Israel. However, Cameron et al. (2018) also highlighted positive indications of subjective wellbeing, for example in relation to family life. The authors argued for a need to move away from a focus on 'dependence' and towards a reconceptualisation of 'independence' that takes account of the ways in which 'evolving qualities of social interdependencies' are shaped by welfare regimes for young people who have left care (op.cit., p170). Other recent authors have similarly argued for a move towards a model of *relational interdependence* when it comes to considering the support needs of care experienced people (e.g., Bakketeig et al., 2020). Attention to interdependency in these studies highlights the ways in which the lives of care experienced adults are shaped by their relationships over time: with social and legal systems and structures; with the individuals responsible for enacting those systems;

and with informal and kin networks that may involve complex risks and responsibilities as well as mutual care⁷.

These findings arguably resonate with those observed in a Polish study by Grotowska-Leder and Kudlińska-Chróścicka (2021), who conducted qualitative research with 41 care experienced people aged 28-32 years. While focused on this older age group, their study predominantly focused on the transition from care to adulthood; in line with other international research, they noted that transitions were accelerated and compressed for young people in Poland, while also being perceived as rapid and chaotic. The transition to adulthood from foster care was described as highly institutionalised in Poland with the state promoting the taking on of adult social roles and an emphasis on leading an independent life embedded in legal regulations and public policies. The authors noted how this feature of the care system in Poland shapes the biographies of care leavers.

Martin and colleagues (2023) add to understanding of gender in the context of care experience via their quantitative study involving 81 care experienced people aged between 25 and 35 years, in Spain (Catalonia, the Canary Islands, Cantabria). These authors reported that female care leavers more frequently became parents, and reported lower life satisfaction than male care leavers in the sample. The authors noted that the situation of participants in their study did appear to improve over time however, they did have to deal with experiences that placed them in vulnerable situations, for example regarding drug and alcohol use.

Findings of studies with adults who are further from their time in care resonate with the above reported findings among those in their twenties. In Australia, this work has focused on those among the Forgotten Australians population, who were in institutional or other out-of-home care in the last century⁸. Smith and colleagues (2021) drew on qualitative interviews to explore sense of belonging among 21 Forgotten Australians aged 44-75, highlighting 'feelings of social disconnection; the

⁷ For a more detailed discussion, see Boddy 2023.

⁸ Forgotten Australians are those among the estimated 500,000 children (including Indigenous Australians and children who migrated to Australia) who were in institutional or other out-of-home care contexts in the 20th century. See <https://forgottenaustralians.org.au/about/forgotten-australians>

need to construct safe places; and a desire to belong' (p.137). Importantly, these authors noted that many participants continue to 'experience the harmful legacy of their childhoods', living with difficulties integrating into social life. Similarly, Fernandez and colleagues (2019) reported on a sub-set of findings from an Australian mixed methods study of in-care and post-care experiences of 67 British child migrants who were in care in Australia between 1930 to 1989. Participants were aged 54-89 and the authors found that emotional, physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by adults and peers had occurred frequently during their childhoods. Critically, the authors noted that the consequences of maltreatment whilst in care had persisted into adulthood.

In Israel, Frantsman-Spector et al. (2021) interviewed 23 participants aged 36-42 years, who had been placed in residential care in Israel during their childhood. The focus of this paper was on how these adults define, experience, and relate to the concept of 'at-risk children'. The authors argued that the construction and use of labels such as 'at-risk children' should incorporate consideration of the lived experiences of those who carry the labels. As with other studies involving care experienced people in middle adulthood, the authors pointed to the long-term impact of being labelled 'at risk' for issues of identity and recognition.

A further subset of studies have documented more positive narratives amongst care experienced adults. Crous et al. (2021) interviewed 13 care leavers aged 25-36 years in Spain (Catalonia), considering how the interaction between the care system and youth can promote resilience from a long-term perspective. The authors noted that personal (ability to deal with adverse circumstances), relational (social support), and environmental (education) factors promoted resilience among participants. Perhaps especially relevant to our current study *Care Leavers 10 Years On*, the passage of time was seen to have helped study participants to 'blend into the landscape' – stepping away somewhat from their identity as a care leaver.

Similarly, in Ghana, Frimpong-Manso (2020) discussed factors that promote successful transitions through early adulthoods for seven care experienced people aged 26-29 years. This study was specifically concerned with sharing positive stories, providing an alternative perspective to studies that contain narratives that

“fuel low expectations” and negative stereotype toward care leavers (p.16). Frimpong-Manso (2020) reported that networks of social support, personal capacities, preparation for adulthood, and positive relationships facilitated care leavers’ successful transition into emerging adulthoods. In India, Keshri (2021) also highlighted the role of support, in a qualitative study exploring experiences of transitioning from institutional care to independent living for 13 ‘orphan care leavers’ aged 25-28 years. Participants in this study saw opportunities and challenges as an inevitable part of independent living, but even in difficult circumstances, they were said to have kept hope and have positive aspirations about their lives. Importantly, participants identified very strong informal networks of care leavers as their main source of support. In a related area, Refaeli and colleagues (2022) explored factors associated with satisfaction with intimate relationships and parenthood among Israeli care leavers a decade after leaving care. This paper was based on quantitative interviews conducted as part of a longitudinal study with 152 young people 10 years after leaving care. The authors found that satisfaction with intimate relationships among participants was associated with higher income, fewer traumatic, life events, and higher self-esteem (Refaeli et al., 2022). This paper is notable for its consideration of ‘satisfaction’ as opposed to a more deficit-focused perspective. Considering more intra-personal factors, Jensen (2021) examined how former residents of Danish children’s homes attempt to reconstruct fragmented memories and fragile relationships through memory-work. Drawing on qualitative methods with 50 people with care experience who were born between the 1940s and 1960s, Jensen drew ‘attention to the tangible and creative practices and processes by which care leavers attempt to rebuild fragmented memories, fragile relationships, and rootless selves’ (p.89).

The studies noted above, examining experiences of care leavers over the age of 25, shed light on critical considerations for our current study. They document some of the ways in which the passage of time can potentially enhance wellbeing, and highlight the importance through adulthood of support networks and relationships. At the same time, this research demonstrates that forms of disadvantage can persist, particularly for those who experienced significant physical and psychological trauma during their time in care. There exists only a small body of work to date, but findings

are remarkably consistent across very diverse national contexts, and point to the likely value of new research with Irish care leavers ten years on.

3. Gaps in understanding?

An inclusive and holistic perspective

As noted above, much of the published literature has focused on a particular domain or aspect of life experience post-care, for example, education, work, the transition from care; relatively few studies have published analyses that engage with the intersection of life domains from a biographical perspective. Similarly, publications have often focused on the experience of a particular group within the care-experienced community – for example, focusing on care leavers with particular kinds of placement experience, such as foster or institutional care (e.g., Diraditsile, & Nyadza 2018; Haggman-Laitila et al. 2018), on particular population subgroups, such as people of colour (Karolia and Wainwright 2020) or people seeking asylum (Ní Raghallaigh & Thornton 2017). The value of focused studies for interrogating specific issues is without question, but one consequence is a relative dearth of research which engages holistically with the diversity of the care experienced population. Siloes in research understanding are echoed in policy, as France (2016: 32) notes, ‘Some government departments are seen as being more about youth than others [...] but most other departments or ministries in government will make policies that have impacts on young people.’ His arguments are especially relevant to considering how policy might better support care leavers 10 years on: no longer clearly the domain of ‘youth policy’, their needs risk being marginalised in policy portfolios that are not concerned with child welfare or leaving care. This challenge implies a critical need for research to take an inclusive and holistic approach.

The review identified a range of papers that reported on outcomes (sometimes from a long-term perspective) among care experienced young adults; these predominantly drew on quantitative approaches, assessing outcomes against objective or standardised indicators (e.g. educational attainment) (e.g. Zeira et al., 2024). Evidence that care experienced people face risk of disadvantage in relation to normative population outcomes has a crucial function in highlighting support needs, and informing the development of policy and practice. But as has been written

elsewhere (e.g., Rees & Munro 2019; Bakketeig et al. 2020), a broader understanding of outcomes is necessary to engage with the complex subjectivities and dynamic interdependencies of young adult lives in time.

Relatedly, qualitative and biographical research has a key role to play in shining light on the causal processes that underpin findings from quantitative studies, where ‘the metaphor of the black box is often used to delineate a relationship that can be hinted at through the operation of different variables – but the nature of this relationship remains hidden inside’ (Østergaard and Thomson 2020: 424). Drawing on Abbott’s (1992) arguments for applying a *narrative* rather than a *variable* logic, Østergaard and Thomson (op.cit.) caution against the assumption that any single variable (such as care experience for our purposes) is ‘doing all the acting’. Equally, ‘outcomes’ are not ‘endpoints’ (Boddy et al. 2020), but merely a representation of a particular aspect of a life as it is documented at a given moment in time. A qualitative biographical approach has the capacity to provide a nuanced analysis of the dynamic contingencies of different facets of experience – individual, structural and relational – in varied lives over time. Our review found that papers reporting on long-term outcomes for care experienced adults were less concerned with everyday lives and biographies, indicating a knowledge gap that could improve understanding of complex causality and pathways through adult lives. Particular gaps in knowledge exist regarding the experiences and views of adults with care experience in Ireland.

It is beyond the scope of this review to identify all gaps in knowledge that exist in relation to adult care leavers’ lives and experiences, but the literature discussed above indicates a need for research to address key domains including physical health (and related areas such as dental health, nutrition and diet, or sleep), as well as specific issues such as alcohol or substance use, which may be related to mental health and wellbeing support needs. Few studies have addressed finances and poverty or economic and housing precarity, although where this has been addressed it is clearly a critical challenge which intersects with other domains, such as (scope for) support from family and housing precarity. As noted above, intra-generational relationships – with siblings, friends and romantic partners – are also little addressed in the literature, although these relationships are of key significance in many young adult lives.

These are just some of the areas of life (together with those that are addressed above) that are critical for research to address in order to understand care experience holistically. As Boddy et al. (2020) discuss, when moving through adulthood, care experienced people encounter 'normative' experiences and transitions – for example, starting or finishing education, work or training, moving home, navigating friendships and romantic relationships, or having children. Such experiences are common in early adulthood and are not particular to having been in care, but they may reveal distinctive precarities that arise as features of care experience (such as the accessibility of emotional or financial support) intersect with everyday lives in time. Categories of change also coincide – for example, the end of a romantic relationship might involve a change of living situation or financial circumstances. To understand how policy and practice might best be developed to support care leavers in their adult lives depends on a holistic approach, attending to the ways in which normative and distinctive aspects of care experienced adulthood coincide. The current study will begin to address these gaps in knowledge and understanding by tracing the experiences of care leavers in Ireland 10 years on from leaving care.

4. Methodological and ethical learning?

Approaches to data collection

Just over half of the identified publications utilised a qualitative research design – 99 of the 175 papers included in the final dataset. Given the aims of the research that this review is designed to inform – and in line with the arguments noted above about the need for qualitative biographical research that engages with the diversity of care experienced adult lives – in this section we focus on learning from that qualitative body of literature, drawing where appropriate on other relevant studies involving young adults. The majority of qualitative studies described using 'semi-structured', 'in-depth', and 'open-ended' interviews (e.g. Frimpong-Manso, 2022; 2022; Arnau-Sabates & Gilligan, 2020); usually these were conducted in person and one-to-one, but some were noted as taking place online (Gilligan et al., 2022; Moore & Thew, 2023) and some over the phone (Cabrera et al., 2020; Tayri & Sprio, 2023). Use of focus group interviewing was also reported (Grotowska-Leder & Kudlińska-Chróścicka, 2021; Holland, 2009).

Qualitative interviewing can of course take many different forms. Twenty-four papers report on studies that drew on biographical / life story approaches; this is of particular interest in the context of the planned approach to data collection for the current study. Several of these papers examined particular domain(s) of life using a long-term perspective, for example: educational pathways (Brady & Gilligan, 2019; Groining & Sting, 2019; Hollingworth, 2012); aspects of motherhood (Blaxland et al., 2022; Coler, 2018; Creswell, 2019); and housing pathways and experiences (Natalier & Johnson, 2012; 2015; Mayock & Parker, 2019). Several of the papers that drew on biographical-focused approaches sought to explore broader experiences among the care experienced community. For example, Artamonova et al. (2020) used biographical interviews to gain insight into experiences of care leavers from different generations; participants in this study were aged 22-55 years. Gabriel et al. (2021) report on findings of a study with 37 adults who were formerly in residential care in Switzerland between 1950-1990. Findings reported draw on biographical narrative interviews with this group and focused on social networks, parenthood, and state interventions. Grotowska and Kudlińska-Chróścicka (2021) presented findings from 'quasi-biographical' interviews with 14 care experienced adults aged 28-32 years; the focus of this paper was on broad experiences of transitioning from care to adulthood. Similarly, Refaeli et al. (2017) shared findings from biographical interviews with care experienced adults, focused on aspects of support in the transition process among three study participants. Luyten et al. (2019) provided insights into the Belgian context, reporting on findings of life history interviews with 38 care experienced adults aged 21-66 years. The authors investigate how the adults experienced being in care, how they perceived the impact of this on their later life course, and how they reflected on shifts in their narratives as their lives progressed.

As indicated above, these studies varied in size and focus, and in the detail provided about the biographical interviewing approach. The majority used spoken interview methods, although there are examples of using creative or participatory approaches such as music, photography and life charts (e.g., Bakketeig et al. 2020); wider literature in cognate fields such as youth or auto/biography studies indicates the value of such approaches for disrupting the tendency for biographical methods to impose an appearance of straightforward chronological trajectories on the chaos of 'life as lived' (Ravn 2019, following Bourdieu). Nonetheless, considered together, the

reviewed research indicates the potential for a biographical approach to engage broadly with lived experience, providing opportunities for reflection and allowing for a rounded understanding of post-care experiences and pathways.

Ethics, inclusivity and care

A substantial methodological literature, as well as formal research guidance, has addressed ethics in research with populations who may be vulnerable or marginalised (for some recent examples, see Mallon, Borgstrom and Murphy's (2020) special issue of the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, on sensitive research). Historically, the social research ethics literature has focused predominantly on participant recruitment and data gathering, but increasingly, researchers have also drawn attention to researchers' positionality and responsibilities, including the need to establish trust, and to ensure respect, integrity and appropriate forms of reciprocity in relationships with participants; these principles also demand attention to the ethics of representation, for participants and study populations, in thinking through what it means to be documented (e.g., Pickering & Kara 2017; Shaw et al. 2020; Thunberg 2020; Thomson et al. 2024). Relatedly, alongside a growth in co-produced and participatory approaches is a critical question about the researchers' position in co-produced designs – with an ethical imperative for critical reflection to avoid tokenism and the reproduction of structural inequalities (e.g., Moll et al. 2020). A detailed discussion of this wider methodological literature on co-production and participatory methods is beyond the scope of this rapid review, but there is a significant body of good practice in ethical research from this wider field that is highly relevant to research with care experienced adults.

Within the literature included in this narrative review, some papers addressed specific issues that may be particularly relevant to the process of undertaking research within a diverse community of care experienced adults – for example, in relation to research with marginalised or 'seldom heard' communities, and the potential for power imbalance, stigmatisation, or bias within the research process (e.g., Join-Lambert et al. 2020; Boddy 2023; Ellis et al., 2023), as well as in addressing the potential for research to uncover safeguarding concerns or unmet support needs (e.g., Boddy 2023). Keller et al.'s (2023) edited collection draws

together a variety of innovative research on leaving care and transitions to adulthood; here we draw on three chapters that offer particularly relevant learning for our purposes:

- Mupaku and colleagues (2023) drew on data from studies in three countries to highlight key considerations and methodological issues when interviewing disabled care leavers. Among others, they pointed to the need for researchers to ‘commit to inclusive research approaches’ (p.124), emphasising the importance of *actively* seeking to recruit disabled care leavers with relevant gatekeepers. A key principle the authors raised is the need to ‘engage in reciprocal dialogue with professionals, parents/carers and young people to push the boundaries of traditional, often paternalistic, approaches to disability and leaving care’ (p.124).
- Purtell (2023) noted the impact on knowledge generation if research does not fully capture the realities of ‘hard to reach’ or disengaged groups. This author argued for the value of ‘edgy’ research methods that draw on trauma-informed and participatory theories in such circumstances, proposing an adaptive participation model as a framework that seeks to maximise representation of ‘hard to reach’ care leavers, working through four key components – resource mapping, modes of inquiry for empowering practice, preparation and risk mitigation, and audience and influence.
- Farragher and colleagues (2023) called on researchers to implement ‘care’ into all stages of research design when undertaking research with care leavers. The authors also provided a useful ‘checklist for care-leaving researchers’ to consider using when considering, designing, and conducting research in the area of care leaving. The checklist includes questions such as:
 - What power imbalance and challenges to participation may arise (for example, timing of interview, place, funding)?
 - What steps could you take to establish a more trustful and harmonised relationship with participants?
 - What kind of language or terms do participants use to describe their identities and experiences? (Farragher et al., 2023: 161).

Key lessons for the current study may be gleaned from the literature identified within the rapid review in conjunction with a wider body of knowledge about ethical practice in research with potentially vulnerable, stigmatised or marginalised communities. Overall, again, good practice will depend on balancing specific considerations – including those documented in Farragher and colleagues' (2023) checklist – within a situated and reflexive approach to research ethics, recognising how ethics responsibilities span the duration of a study from conceptualisation to dissemination and representation.

Conclusion

This narrative rapid review provides an overview of recent international research concerned with the outcomes and experiences of care experienced adults aged 25 years and over. Among the 175 sources identified, only 13 focused exclusively on care experienced adults over 25 years old, and these spanned very diverse age groups and geographic and care contexts. Most studies included participants over the age 25 as part of samples spanning a broader age range (e.g. 18-27 years) or in longitudinal research that stretched beyond 25 years, and studies with mixed age groups did not necessarily disaggregate participants at different ages within their analysis. This observation confirms that the current study, interviewing young adults 10 years on from the transition of leaving care, will address a clear gap in knowledge about care experienced adult lives.

Within the scope of this review, we have primarily focused on mapping the field, while also outlining key findings of the 13 studies that focused specifically on care experienced adults aged over 25. Unsurprisingly, perhaps – given the above-noted point about the age ranges studied – the research reviewed is predominantly consistent with studies of younger populations (see DCEDIY 2023 for a recent review focused on the Irish context). People with care experience often face distinctive challenges through adult lives, although difficulties are not inevitable and the passage of time may provide opportunities for positive / supportive development and experiences. After-care provision often falls short in practice, potentially exacerbating uncertainty and precarity in key domains and through critical points of

transition in early adulthoods. A relational perspective is also clearly crucial, as pathways are shaped by dis/continuities in support networks associated with care status and care leaving, and through complex ongoing relationships with biological kin networks. Further challenges include heightened risks of stigma and delayed progress in education and employment settings. Outcome-focused studies soon after 18 years may overestimate immediate difficulties and underestimate future potential; critical to progress is timely, relevant support rooted in high quality relationships.

The topics identified within this rapid review provide a starting point for consideration of topics for discussion in the current study, but a holistic and integrative approach is necessary to achieve a nuanced understanding of variations in experiences and outcomes for adults who have been in care. As Paulsen and Berg (2016) argue, we need to put more effort into understanding the different types of support that care leavers may need through their adult lives. While many domains of life were examined in the existing literature, there remain clear gaps in knowledge – both substantively regarding domain areas and in relation to broader experiences of life after leaving care. The focus on quantifiable outcome domains within much of the existing literature coincides with a relative paucity of knowledge about the everyday lives of adult care leavers. These areas demand consideration in the current study; integrating learning from the wider youth transitions literature alongside care-focused literature will further increase insight into the gaps in current knowledge. This exercise might also identify points for reflection regarding conceptualisation of certain frequently used but relatively under-theorised concepts in the care literature, such as ‘outcomes’, ‘identity’, and ‘support’ in the context of care experience.

Finally, the rapid review provides evidence of the need for, and potential value, of an inclusive and holistic qualitative biographical approach to research with young adults, drawing on creative approaches to provide an alternative understanding that disrupts deficit-focused hegemonic narratives, whilst attending to the complex challenges and varied experiences navigated by adults with care experience. Ethics considerations are central to all facets of the research - beyond implementation of the study through recruitment and data collection, through analysis and representation of care experienced lives and derivation of policy implications. Again, integrating care-

focused and wider methodological literature helps to ensure that distinctive considerations are addressed through a situated and reflexive ethical methodology.

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Appendix 1

Original Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care leavers aged 25+ - Samples <i>including</i> care leavers aged 25+ <p>Search criteria to include: 'care experience/d', 'care leaver', 'looked after', as well as care contexts as below.</p> <p>Search criteria for sample age range to include 'adult', 'young adult', 'youth', as well as age ranges.</p>
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care leavers who spent time in the following placement types as children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Foster care o Residential care o Secure / special care
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences - Outcomes - Maybe also 'transitions', 'life course', 'life events', and search terms relating to specific life events/life domains (see below)
Outcome/research domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education (and sub-terms, e.g., 'university', 'higher education', etc) - Employment (and sub-terms, e.g., voluntary employment, activism) - Housing - Relationships (with birth family, carers) - Friendship and peer relationships - Mental health - Physical health - Parenthood/motherhood/fatherhood - Family life - Intergenerational support - Criminal justice involvement - Financial support (and sub-terms, e.g., money, debt, benefits) - Broad domains like precarity/security/stability - ?
Other Study Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study contexts: All countries where studies are reported in English

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study period: 2000-2020 (to start with, but extending back as appropriate – e.g., sources identified via citations) - Study language: English - Study / publication type: Peer review articles + grey literature - Quality (as per criteria in Iyer et al. 2020) and relevance (team evaluation re. study objectives).
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Exclusion Criteria
Studies focused on care leavers aged 24 and under
Studies published in languages other than English
Studies published prior to 2000 [TBC]
Conceptual / theoretical papers
Book reviews
Newspaper articles
Conference proceedings

Appendix 2

Countries represented in the final dataset:

1. Argentina (2)
2. Australia (16)
3. Austria (3)
4. Belgium (2)
5. Botswana (1)
6. Britain (2)
7. Canada (6)
8. Catalonia (2)
9. China (2)
10. Croatia (1)
11. Czech Republic (1)
12. Democratic Republic of the Congo (3)
13. Denmark (9)
14. England (20)
15. Ethiopia (5)
16. France (2)
17. Finland (2)
18. Germany (5)
19. Ghana (5)
20. Hungary (1)
21. India (6)
22. Ireland (11)
23. Israel (22)
24. Italy (1)
25. Jordan (1)
26. Kenya (3)
27. Luxembourg (1)
28. Mexico (2)
29. New Zealand (1)
30. Northern Ireland (2)
31. Norway (8)
32. Peru (3)
33. Poland (3)
34. Portugal (2)
35. Romania (4)
36. Rwanda (3)
37. Scotland (2)
38. South Africa (7)
39. Spain (6)
40. Sweden (6)
41. Switzerland (4)
42. Thailand (3)

- 43. Uganda (6)
- 44. UK (25)
- 45. US (7)
- 46. Wales (9)
- 47. Zimbabwe (7)