

Young Care Leavers in Vietnam – Lotus in the Mud Pond

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Young Care Leavers in Vietnam

- Children who need care are often put into public or NGOs funded care centers
- No family foster home system

E.g.: SOS international village; social protection care centers

- Circumstances that lead to living in the care centers: deceased parents; poverty; abused children who fled home
- Children can stay at care centers until 18 years old or longer if they study higher education at universities

Care Centers in Vietnam





Care Center in Vietnam







Care center in Vietnam



Research Questions

- How do young people leaving care in Vietnam manage?
- What happens to them after leaving the care homes/ centers?
- Where do they find help and support?
- What are the challenges that they face?
- What have they found helpful as they try to negotiate their new life outside the care setting?
- Who, if any, are the people they found supportive?

Research Methods

- Phenomenology
- 25 individual interviews with young care leavers
- 6 key informant interviews (3 SOS village mothers, 1 practitioner, 1 young care leaver, 1 SOS management staff)

Sample

Demographic Categories	Number	Demographic Categories	Number
Gender		Care Centers	
Male	15	• Partly international funded care centers	2
Female	10	• 100% public funded care center	4
Age			
21-22	5		
23-24	7		
25-26	9		
27-28	1		
29-30	2		
34	1		

Key Themes

- Responding to the feeling of loneliness
- Negotiating experiences of being stigmatized
- Honoring duties to their two families (biological and care center)
- Searching for support
- Negotiating challenges to their personal identity
- Seeking progress in relation to education Pathway, Job, and Accommodation

Responding to the feeling of loneliness

- **Feeling overwhelmed in the beginning: sad, anxious, stressed**
 - Feeling homesick; everything is new and not knowing anyone
 - Feeling lost as they lose their normal routine
 - Feeling lonely, no one to confide and talk to
- **Feeling of vulnerability: like being abandoned. No one called to check on them**
- **The loneliness is reduced if a person lives close to the previous care center or for people who go into vocational education**
- **A small number felt excited about the freedom and independence.**

Responding to the feeling of loneliness

- **Various coping strategies**

- “I feel lonely and loss every day. If there is no one to talk to, I read books or watch movies which have similar characters like me, or watch comedy shows to laugh it off, then going to sleep. I know that sleeping can be a waste of time some times. But I wasted lots of time to release my mental stress.” (Khanh, 24, SOS village).

- **The loneliness and loss is also reduced as they are adapted to the new life**

- **The loss of direction and not knowing what to do is less in people who go into vocational education.**

- “Koto is the bridge for me to get familiar gradually to the social life, such as hiring an accommodation, paying rent, self-cooking and so on.” (Tung, 24, Male, Anh Sang House).

Negotiating experiences of being stigmatized

- **Afraid of being stigmatized about ex-care status**

- “I knew that I had hardship, but I didn’t like the pity feeling. In the past, I shared with some friends and they felt pity for me, but I didn’t like it. Therefore, I hardly share about it, I just share with some people that I am close.” (Tien, 24, Male, Thu Duc Youth Village)

- **The successful one also hides it**

“When I am outside, at work, I am a are positive, dynamic, quick, and hard-working, but when I come home, I like the quietness and want to be alone. (Xao, 24, Male, Thu Duc Youth Village).

- **Feel “insecure” in intimate relationship and afraid to move the relationship further**

- “My relationship lasted for 1 year. When I lived with the first one, we rarely talked. I was embarrassed whenever I wanted to say something, I wanted to talk but I couldn’t speak it out.” (Tuong, 22, Male, District 8 house).

- **Hard to trust or make new friends**

- More than half said their close friends are childhood friends from schools or friends from the care centers
- Among 7 ppl who are in intimate relationships, their partners are also from schools or care centers

Honoring duties to their two families

- A few still have biological parent, grandparents.
- Most have relatives such as aunts, uncles. Some have siblings
- Despite the fact that our young care leavers did not grow up with their biological families, when they grow up and have income, they have a strong sense of responsibility to care for their biological family
- The sense of duty, obligation to care and support is not only with biological family. Our young people also honor the obligation to give back or support the center that cared for them.
 - “My responsibility is taking care of my blood family, myself, and my family in the village. Sometimes, I have to hold activities for my siblings or take them to the supermarket or something else. Because, my foster mother is very good to me and I also see her like my blood mother. Therefore, the more love you receive, the more responsibility you have in the future.” (Tien, 24, Male, Thu Duc Youth Village).

Searching for support

Supporting network:

- Previous care center: some allowance for the first three years
- “Mother” or staff from the care center
- Close friends

Some has little or no support

- End up in homelessness
- Prostitution

Lack of support can also manifest into the need to have a stable income: can't choose “risky” profession or follow their dreams

Lack of mentor to guide them in their career choice

Negotiating challenges to their Personal Identification

Lack of personal identification and paperwork needed for job application

“If I want to apply in a good environment like 4 - 5 stars restaurant, they wouldn't hire me because I don't have proper paperwork. Without personal ID card, they can't know how old I am. Birth certificate is not enough. So, I can only work in milk tea shop where they don't require much paperwork. (Thuy, 19, SOS village).”

Managing Education, Job & Accommodation

- Education Pathway: Vocational training centers; work pathways; on the job training
- Job: often links to their education level and training
 - Ppl graduated from universities often find good and stable jobs
 - Vocation training often works for bars, café, restaurants, or self-employed to do catering
 - PPpl without any qualifications often struggle to find stable and good jobs
- In many cases, accommodation links to education or work circumstances:
 - Vocational training/ apprenticeship: stays at the center
 - Some stays at the cafe or restaurants that they work as a night guard

Resiliency and determination to succeed amid challenges

Phuong failed high school graduation exam due to family circumstance. She had no light to study in the evening as her aunty could not afford electricity. She worked as a bartender after failing high school for 3-4 months but then had to quit to care for her sick mother. A co-worker of her mother took her in and care for her. She was then able to take evening classes and retook high school exam. Then, she enrolled into vocational training to study fashion design for 2 years. She worked very hard and then was promoted to become shop manager.

Thank you for listening!

