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SUSANNE WALD

**HOMELESSNESS AMONG YOUNG WOMEN
LEAVING CARE
- an exploratory study -**

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ABSTRACT

This study began in 1989 and is about leaving care and youth homelessness among young women. Little was known about young women leaving care, the early transitions of finding and maintaining independent housing, becoming a parent and managing an independent income.

The research was exploratory and conducted in two parts. The first part was an 18 month longitudinal study of a cohort of female care leavers in two local authority areas, following their progress from the age of 17 until almost 19. The outcome of the first part was a typology of care leavers. The second part of the PhD consisted of a test of the typology on a larger sample by surveying a group of professionals through a mailed questionnaire.

There were differences in the way the sample managed the transition to adulthood. Those who coped with the transition to adulthood more successfully, moved into independence later and in a planned way. They had good personal skills and resilience which was not adversely affected by the framework of existing social policies. Those who struggled with the transition to adulthood experienced homelessness, debts and problems in caring for their children. They had fewer personal skills, less stable support and were affected by existing social policies. Broadly, the typology was confirmed by the questionnaire sample.

The study makes recommendations which affect social policies in housing, social security and employment and training and suggests ways in which the typology may assist social work practice in working with young women in care and leaving care.

**FÜR MEINE FAMILIE UND IN ERINNERUNG AN MEINEN VATER,
BERND WALD**

(For my family and in memory of my father, Bernd Wald)

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Senior managers, social workers and foster carers, in the 2 local authorities in which the study was completed, assisted me with making contact with the young women. This project would not have been possible without their willingness to participate.

I am particularly grateful to the Management Committee and staff of the Young Homeless Project in Leamington Spa who invested considerable time and resources into this project. The work of the project and the young people who use the services greatly influenced this thesis. The support of all the members of the Young Homelessness Group enabled me to complete the fieldwork for part 2 of this PhD.

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Preface

This PhD has been closely linked to my work with young people since 1988. Throughout this time I developed an interest and understanding of the issues of leaving care, young people's rights and youth homelessness.

I am a native German speaker. After my Abitur in Germany I came to Britain for a two year volunteer placement. This was followed by four years at university. I qualified as a social worker in 1988. As part of my student placement I worked closely with a young woman in care. She had experienced numerous foster home breakdowns and at the age of 13 began to voice her opinions about foster care and the child care system in general. She felt that she was not respected by foster carers and treated differently from the other children. She thought that nobody believed her version of events. She found social workers unreliable. This raised my initial interest in young people's experience of the care system.

I began working with young people in care and in October 1988, I joined a specialist team working with foster carers and young people at risk. Over the next three years a number of issues arose and were of concern to me. I was struck by the number of foster home breakdowns involving teenagers. In the majority of cases this led to significant upheaval in the young person's life. The issues leading to the breakdown of the placement were rarely resolved. Often young people left in crisis and did not return to the foster home. Although there were discussions between the foster carer and the social worker, and the young person and the social worker, there were few direct discussions between young people and their former carers. New foster placements could not always be found in the same area. Young people had to establish new relationships with another family where there were likely to be different family rules.

I wondered what the effect of this process was on individual young people and how they dealt with those changes emotionally. I co-facilitated a group for young people in care. This work raised issues about their rights within the child care system.

I made contact on behalf of the group with the National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPIC) and the Who Cares Trust. NAYPIC met the 'Care Group' and helped them to voice their views about the services they received. All young people in our district received a copy of the Who Cares magazine. This work led to some young people making complaints about the service they had received and meetings with Senior Managers about the child care system. Young people at this stage were also raising issues about the process of leaving care.

Furthermore, foster carers were asking me what was going to happen when young people in their care reached the age of 18. They expressed concern about the lack of formal policies and procedures to prepare young people for leaving care. For example, there were no clear procedures for financial help, or formal agreements with housing departments to provide secure tenancies for care leavers. There were no leaving care or special accommodation projects providing after care support and housing. I was frequently contacted by social workers to find a supported lodgings or semi-independence placement when young people experienced a foster home disruption at the age of 16. Yet, we had few lodgings placements and no formal links with accommodation providers. I developed a resource list, which was limited because I did not have the necessary knowledge of housing.

The outcome of this work was a proposal for the Young Homeless Project offering advice, accommodation and support to homeless young people. The proposals gave priority in providing housing to groups identified as particularly vulnerable locally, namely young women, care leavers and Black young people. I co-ordinated the development of the project, which opened in 1992. I had been working closely with Centrepoin's National Development Unit and in the summer of 1992 I took up a temporary appointment as manager of this unit. In 1993, after six months at Centrepoin, I was appointed as Co-ordinator for the Young Homeless Project in Leamington Spa. I became Chair of the Young Homelessness Group, a national co-ordinating group, in November 1993.

These areas of concern shaped my approach to the literature review.

Chapter 1: Youth Homelessness, Care and Leaving Care

Introduction

This literature review spans all themes which relate to homelessness among young people and the public child care system since 1948. In looking at homelessness I focus on the areas on which there has been most material, particularly the reasons for becoming homeless and homelessness and poverty. Reference is made to the emergence of homelessness amongst single people, but the main focus is on young people aged 16 to 25. Homelessness also affects other groups such as families and those who have lost their homes through, for example, unemployment or divorce. However, the literature has only recently examined the background to the problem of homelessness and less material is available on those issues. Furthermore, those groups did not relate closely to the themes of this review.

The literature review is divided into 4 historical periods relating to homelessness and public child care: 1948 - 1960, 1960 - 1970, 1970- 1980 and 1980 up to 1990.

There are recurring themes throughout these periods. One of those is how homelessness was seen and defined and how it related to children in care. Another theme is the process of coming into care and how care was experienced by children in the 1970s and 80s. A third aspect is the way children leave care and manage the pressures of becoming an adult, a theme first addressed in the early to mid 1980s. The final theme is the link between having been in care and becoming homeless, which was first made in 1980.

These themes are explored in the following sections starting with the historical context and the recent trends among children in care and homeless young people. This is followed by a third section examining what being in care, leaving care and being homeless is like. The policies and practices affecting the child care system are analysed in the fourth part of this review. The impact of social policies on young people's transition to adulthood and becoming homeless are examined in the final part.

The Historical Context

This review concentrates on the relationship between homelessness and state provision of child welfare. It is therefore mainly concerned with the period post 1948, when local authority children's departments took on the responsibility for the welfare of children under the age of 21. Until then the responsibility for their welfare was with the Poor Law Assistance Boards and voluntary children's organisations such as Dr Barnardos and the National Children's Home (NCH, 1990). Provisions for orphaned or abandoned children were made in orphanages and children's homes run by voluntary organisations and workhouses set up under the Poor Law (Rose, 1988).

Since the Children Act 1948 the state has consistently intervened in the care of children, either to influence parental control over children or by providing substitute care. The first post war government strengthened the law to safeguard children's welfare. Under the Children Act 1948, children were permanently separated from families which had abandoned them. For the first time it was recognised that children should be protected from physical harm. The welfare of children became the responsibility of the state through local authority children's departments. Local authorities were under a duty to the child to "further his best interest and to afford him opportunity for the proper development of his character and abilities". They had to provide shelter, guidance and care to promote a child's welfare, (Children Act 1948 Section (12 and 2)). After the introduction of the Children Act 1948, children who came into care were seen as victims of their families. There was a belief that a new start (George, 1970) would provide them with the opportunity to break with the past and, in the case of fostering, to find a new family.

The Children Act 1948 recognised the need to offer support to young people leaving care. Local authorities were under a duty to advise and befriend young people who had left school and were under the age of 18. Local authorities were also under a duty to inform another local authority if they knew that a child who was leaving care was planning to reside in the area of another local authority. In section 20 of the Children Act 1948, local authorities were given a power to provide grants to young people leaving care and over the age of 18 to further their education. There were little changes to these duties and powers until the Children Act 1989. Roy Parker (1990) found that on leaving care a large numbers of girls went into domestic service and boys into the armed forces.

The policy of increased welfare provision for children remained removing children from the streets. Haywood (1978) reported that in the 1960s the debate about children's welfare was influenced by the cycle of deprivation theory. This argued that children from deprived families were likely to be vulnerable to delinquency and anti social behaviour because the family was failing to socialise them into acceptable norms and values. The 1969 Children Act required social work practice to focus on the family as a whole to ensure the socialisation of children. The criteria for being taken into care were widened. Under the 1969 Act children could be admitted to care under a compulsory order if their proper development was being 'avoidably prevented', their health was being 'avoidably impaired', they were being 'neglected' or 'ill treated', or they were in need of 'care and control', (Child Care Act 1969 Section 1 (2) (a)). The involvement in criminal activities was also included.

Within the child care literature there was no reference to leaving care during the 1950s and 1960s. The law assumed that young people left a children's home at the age of maturity and became independent and responsible for accommodation, employment and financial matters. Only in exceptional circumstances was the need for help recognised. To this end the Children and Young Person's Act 1963 was amended. It gave local authorities the power to provide financial assistance in exceptional circumstances. The number of care leavers entering the armed forces remained high, (National Board for Prices and Income, 1969).

Furthermore, in the 1960s adolescence and youth was recognised as a distinct phase in the transition from childhood to adulthood. This became a new field for research (Coleman, 1961, Hall and Jefferson, 1976) with studies examining particular aspects of young people's behaviour. Cohen (1972) in 'Folk Devils and Moral Panic' argued that the focus on potential delinquency led to a moral panic about young people's behaviour.

There were no references to children under the age of 21 living on the streets in the 1960s. Homelessness at the time focused on single adults and families. Homelessness was defined as either sleeping rough or living in hostels for homeless people. The only reference to children was as part of families who became separated when they lost their home through eviction, (Greve, 1964).

The dramatised documentary 'Cathy Come Home' in 1966, focused public attention on homelessness for the first time in post war Britain. The film argued that losing a home led to homelessness if the family had nowhere to stay together. Families were separated because there was no duty on the state to provide temporary housing for the family as a whole. This led to some children coming into care because of homelessness. Parents were housed separately in hostels for homeless people.

Following 'Cathy Come home', Shelter, the campaign against homelessness, was formed. As homelessness amongst single people became more visible, provision by charities for single homeless people was developed by, for example, the Simon Communities, (Watson and Austerberry, 1986). The network of the Simon Communities and later the Cyrenians, led to the formation for CHAR, the Campaign for the Homeless and Rootless, in 1971. The aim of CHAR was to influence standards in the existing provision for homeless single people and campaign for the housing rights of this group. Watson and Austerberry argued that attitudes to homelessness were also influenced by theories on deprivation and deviance. There was some evidence to support this view as studies by, for example, Edwards (1968) concentrated on the social problems of homelessness.

In the 1970s the problems of young people in care and those leaving care were beginning to be acknowledged. The first references to youth homelessness appeared.

Two events in the 1970s changed the focus of the child care debate. Firstly, in 1973, the tragic death of Maria Colwell, after she had been reunited with her parents, raised questions about social work practice. Secondly, the first publicly funded studies into the child care system were published. Rowe and Lambert (1973) argued that the system was not meeting the needs of all children. There was evidence of poor planning and little contact between children and their families. This led, they argued, to some children being abandoned in the care system.

Criticisms of the child care system were reflected in work with young people leaving care.

In 1976 Stan Godek undertook a small study of teenagers leaving residential care for Dr Barnardos. He found evidence of poor preparation for leaving care, significant financial and housing difficulties, as well as isolation and loneliness. Links were made between the often poor experiences in care and the process of leaving care. These findings were echoed by Mulvey (1977). Biographical accounts by Kahan (1979) also confirmed this view. The newly established Who Cares groups in 1977 - 79 quoted young people's fears about their lack of readiness for leaving care.

Some of these emerging concerns about children in care and leaving care were reflected in the Child Care Act 1980. It placed a new emphasis on child protection, long term planning for those in care and rehabilitation for those due to return home. Section 2 of the Child Care Act 1980 stated that children could be received into care as part of a voluntary arrangement between parents and social services. The issue of leaving care was only marginally addressed in the law. There was no specific reference to preparation and planning for leaving care. Given such a discretionary framework, social work practice in preparation for leaving care and after care support varied widely.

"A vague provision such as this is open to different interpretations and consequently local authorities' use of this section varies widely."

(Wolmar, 1980)

There were small increases in the duties and powers of local authorities in relation to leaving care services. Local authorities were responsible for offering advice and befriending up to the age of 18. There was an implicit recognition that there was a need for further financial, emotional and material support, but this was spelt out in permissive powers only, rather than duties. The law was based on the belief that after care support was only necessary for some individuals, who had failed because of personal circumstances.

"A local authority may assist towards expenses of maintenance, education and training of persons over 17 who were in care,"

(Section 27 Child Care Act, 1980)

**"A local Authority has a duty to advise and befriend a young person over the age of sixteen and under the age of eighteen who has been in care,"
(Section 28 Child Care Act 1980).**

**"A local authority has power to visit and assist persons under twenty one who were formerly in their care,"
(Section 29 Child Care Act 1980)**

In the early 1970s, homelessness studies among single people focused on welfare problems. Studies by, for example, Wingfield Digby (1976) looked at rough sleepers, reception centres and nightshelters and drug and alcohol abuse. In 1975, for the first time since the 1890s, attention focused on youth homelessness. The film, 'Johnny Go Home' highlighted the street homelessness of young people over the age of 16 who had moved to London looking for the bright lights and entertainment. Youth homelessness emerged as a new term. It was restricted to those over the age of 16, who could leave home with parental consent, and for whom there was no statutory duty of protection by social services departments, as there was for the under 16s. The term youth homelessness generally also implied an upper age limit of 25, based on the United Nations definition of young people.

In response to seeing young people on the streets a small number of agencies in large cities, such as London and Birmingham opened shelters specifically for homeless young people, (Centrepont Soho, 1970).

After the transfer of responsibility for homelessness to the Department of the Environment in the late 1970s, homelessness started to be seen in the wider context of housing policy and provision. There was a shift towards examining homelessness as a structural rather than an individual welfare problem. Campaign groups, for example, Homeless Action (1977) and research by Drake et al (1981) were linking homelessness to an adequate supply of affordable housing.

O' Mahony (1988) reported that following concern expressed by emerging agencies about rising numbers of homeless young people, a Government Working Group was set up. It reported in 1976 but recommendations to give homeless young people a statutory right to housing were not included in the 1977 Housing (Homeless Person's) Act. The 1977 Housing Act set the framework for the statutory provision of housing for homeless households. In order to be accepted as homeless a person or family first had to satisfy the definition of homelessness set by The Act. A homeless household was defined as those without accommodation:

"which he and anybody who normally resides with him as a member of his family...is entitled to occupy, or if he has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or if it is probable that his occupation of it will lead to violence or real threats of violence from someone else residing there,"

(Housing (Homeless Person's) Act 1977)

A further criteria of acceptance was that the applicant must not have made him, or herself, intentionally homeless through any fault of their own. Following their acceptance as homeless, families and other specific groups were given priority in the allocation of permanent council tenancies. Thornton (1990) pointed out that the majority of young single people were excluded from the priority groups. Single people were only covered under the vulnerability clause:

"vulnerable because of old age, mental illness and handicap or physical disability or any other special reason,"

(Housing Homeless Persons Act S.2(1)(c))

There was now a duty on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation for households accepted as homeless and in priority need. This significantly reduced the numbers of children in care because of homelessness.

In the 1980s the literature reflected the experiences of all 3 groups of children and young people;-

- those in care
- those leaving care
- those who were homeless.

A fourth group of homeless care leavers was also identified. There were concerns about the welfare of each group.

In an article in the housing magazine, Roof, Wolmar (1980) argued that care leavers were being found to be homeless. As a result Shelter established Homebase, which later became First Key, the National Leaving Care Advisory Service.

At that time the definition of homelessness expanded to cover more than street homelessness. A continuum from sleeping rough to outright owner occupation was suggested by Watson and Austerberry, (1986). Drake et al (1981) defined as homeless not only street homeless people but also those in nightshelters and day centres.

Between the mid and late 1980s publications on youth homelessness increased. They no longer focused on street homelessness but included studies of those staying in hostels. There was an attempt to estimate those not visibly homeless, such as those staying with friends.

In 1984 the Young Homelessness Group was established to campaign on the issue of youth homelessness. It initially involved agencies such as Shelter and CHAR and later children's organisations such as Barnardos and NCH Action for Children, (Saunders, 1986).

By the late 1980s young homeless people were being characterised as younger and more vulnerable than previously. They were leaving home because of conflict rather than to seek work. Reports at this time, for example O'Mahony (1988), Randall (1988, 89) and Thornton (1990) all made reference to homeless care leavers.

This group was seen as particularly vulnerable.

Recent trends in care, leaving care and youth homelessness

This section reviews recent trends and developments in the population of children in care, those leaving care, those who became homeless and homeless care leavers in the late 1980s. The focus of this section is children who were permanently in care, likely to leave sometime between the ages of 16 and 18. No reference is made to children moving in and out of care as these were mainly under the age of 12.

Although the overall number of children in care had fallen by the late 1980s, being in care was a significant experience for many young people. On the 31.3.1986 there were 67,300 children and young people in care (Children in Care of Local Authorities on 31.3.1986, England) compared to 92,268 in 1981. The data gave a static view, as it was based on one particular day during 1986. The flow of children in and out of care was not analysed, (Rowe, et al 1989).

Children and young people were placed in either foster or residential care. The percentage of children and young people placed with foster carers remained at an even level during the 1980s. In 1986 there were 35,116 children and young people boarded out with foster parents. This represented 52.2% of all children in care. Relatively little was known about gender differences of those in foster care.

Among young people in care between the age of 10 and 15, 45.45% of boys and 56% of girls were living with foster parents. This could have been due to the fact that girls were perceived as being 'more fosterable' than boys, (Children in Care of Local Authorities on 31.3.1986).

Despite an overall decrease in the number of children and young people in residential care by nearly 10,000 between 1982 and 1986, residential care remained important for the teenage group.

13,855, or 20.6% of children and young people in care on 31.3.1986, were placed in residential care, predominantly in the 10 - 17 year old age group, (Children in Care of Local Authorities on the 31.3.1986). More boys with challenging behaviour were placed in residential care, a point made by Packman (1986). This difference was not explored further by the author, or by others examining the child care system at the time, (for example, Fisher et al 1986, Milham et al 1986).

Bebbington and Miles (1989) found that children from minority ethnic groups, Black children and children of mixed heritage were over represented among children in care.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s the use of compulsory orders to admit children and young people to care increased. In 1980 3 out of 4 young people were admitted on care orders, (Packman, 1986 p.5). Packman (1986) related this to the impact of the death of Maria Colwell (1973) on subsequent social work practice. Compulsory orders meant that children were likely to stay in care for longer and led to less contact between children and their parents, (Millham, 1986).

Stein and Carey (1986) argued that there was a trend for young people to leave care and move into independent accommodation at the age of 16 and 17 and before their legal discharge from care. There were 7,010 young people who had reached the age of 18 and were leaving care in England in 1986, (Children in Care of Local Authority Care on 31.3.1986). Taking into account 16 and 17 year olds who were likely to have left care before their formal discharge, the figure is likely to have been in the region of 14,000.

"On their 18th Birthday, and sometimes even before, anyone in care is considered to be an adult and able to fend for themselves. They are suddenly faced with finding a place to rent and budgeting the cost of living."

(Guardian, 20.12.1989).

This independence was much earlier than for the majority of 18 years olds of whom only 16% lived outside the family home, (National Child Development Study quoted in NCB Highlights, October 1988).

Furthermore, Stein and Carey (1986) found that the lack of leaving care policies meant that young people who had been in voluntary care were often confused as to when they had left care.

Due to the limited nature of studies at the time, little is known about the particular experiences of young women and Black young people. No work was done to specifically examine their experiences.

There were no official government statistics on the level of youth homelessness in the 1980s.

The official level of homelessness was recorded by local authorities annually in their returns to the Department of the Environment. In 1988 local authorities in England accepted 116,060 homeless applicants out of a total of 242,470 applications (DOE, 1989). This excluded most single people. Under Part 3 of the Housing Act 1985 (formerly the 1977 Housing (Homeless Person's) Act), Housing Authorities had the responsibility to assess the needs of a homeless applicant and record all cases of acceptance. O Mahony (1988), Cosgrave, 1988) and Greve (1985) found that as the majority of single people were not in a priority need category they were not accepted and consequently not recorded as homeless. Greve (1985) concluded that many single homeless people were unlikely even to approach local authorities, assuming they would not be categorised as homeless, or if categorised, excluded from housing through ever increasing waiting lists.

The count of rough sleepers in central London as an indicator of homelessness was rejected by voluntary organisations (Randall, 1988), as it excluded all those in temporary accommodation. Voluntary organisations attempted to estimate the true size of the problem, but these estimates were often based on referral rates or occupancy of hostels and did not include those "out of sight", for example those staying with friends and relatives.

In the absence of government statistics a number of studies attempted estimates of youth homelessness.

Cathy Newman (1989) suggested a figure of 98,000 young people who had run away from home or care and were potentially homeless. This figure was based on the police statistics of young people reported as missing. Randall (1988) reported that there were 51,000 young people staying in temporary accommodation in London. Shelter (Sunday Times, 10.12.1989) thought that there were 75,000 young homeless people in Britain. None of these figures gave an accurate account of the number of young people sleeping rough, staying with friends, remaining in abusive and/or conflict situations or those remaining with exploitative partners. Therefore, the problem of so called 'hidden homelessness', meaning those not visibly homeless on the streets or in hostels, remained.

The figures were not accurate and it was not clear whether they were overstating or underestimating the scale of the problem. On the one hand, Randall (1988, 1989) and Newman (1989) based their studies on emergency hostels and a refuge for runaways. This provision attracted those who had recently become homeless and in the main excluded the long term homeless and rough sleepers. On the other hand, figures based on young people missing from home included those who were found within hours and were in fact not homeless. Those who absconded numerous times were likely to have been counted more than once (Newman, 1989).

By the late 1980s more young people were seen sleeping rough in central London. Small agencies pointed to a substantial increase in their referral rates. Cosgrave (1988) cited a growing homelessness population in central London as evidence of a growing problem.

In the absence of national statistics, the only evidence was provided by small localised agencies. The following examples were typical of small organisations. Piccadilly Advice Centre reported that there was a 47% increase in referrals in 1988, with a general increase in housing, especially emergency enquiries (Information Services Charity, Annual Report 1988-89). First Stop in Leeds found that homelessness in Leeds doubled between 1985 and 1988 (First Stop Annual Report, 1989). Avon Off the Record reported that the number of young people seeking advice on housing and social security problems trebled between 1972/73 and 1982/83 (CHAR, 1989).

These were substantial increases. However, it has to be borne in mind that some could have been due to better liaison and networking among agencies.

The statistics were mainly based on information recorded in large urban areas and might not have reflected the situation in smaller geographical areas. It would seem unlikely that these points could explain, for example, a tenfold increase.

By the late 1980s, the profile of homeless young people had changed. There seemed to have been an increase in young people under the age of 18. Centrepiece, Soho reported that in 1972 only 14.5% of homeless young people were under 18 (Randall, 1989). This had risen to 40% in 1987 (Randall, 1988). By the late 1980s, First Stop in Leeds also found that there was an increase in the proportion of young people under 18, (First Stop, Annual Report, 1989). An increase in the number of young women and Black people facing homelessness and seeking advice was also seen in Leeds (First Stop, 1989), Avon and nationally by Citizen's Advice Bureaux (NACAB, 1988). A report by CHAR (1989) found that homelessness particularly among young women was also a problem in rural and small urban areas.

Wolmar's link between leaving care and homelessness was important, as it highlighted the plight of homeless care leavers for the first time, (Wolmar, 1980).

"Each year, thousands of eighteen year olds celebrate their 18th birthday with fear. Far from being flushed with the newly acquired status of adulthood, they anticipate having nowhere to live. Their parents will tell them they have to leave home. They are unlikely to have much money and few will have friends or relatives they can stay with. These teenagers have been in care and their parents are the local authority."

(Wolmar, 1980 p.8)

The evidence relied on a number of case studies. There was no attempt to quantify the extent of the problem. A study funded by the Department of the Environment, 'Single and Homeless' (Drake et al, 1981), was the first to put a figure on the number of care leavers among homeless young people. The authors found that 32% of homeless people had been in care (Drake et al, 1981).

Randall in a later survey (1989) for Centrepont Soho, reported that 41% of young homeless people had been in care. Neither Drake et al (1981) nor Randall, (1989) were able to highlight gender differences.

Both sets of figures received widespread publicity but they were based on small samples. There were difficulties in assessing the accuracy and significance of the figures. Randall's sample was restrictive as it was taken from one hostel for newly homeless young people in central London. The total number to which the research referred was 49. Drake et al (1982) took their sample from nightshelters, day centres and long and short stay hostels. Although a wider sample, the figure of 32% applied to 15 out of 44 young people under the age of 20. It included many who had been long term homeless. Thornton (1990) argued that the percentages were significant because only 1% of the population was likely to have been in care. This did suggest that there was an emerging issue worthy of further investigation.

The Social Condition of Being in Care, Leaving Care and Homelessness

In the 1980s research into the areas of children in care, leaving care and youth homelessness increased substantially. The problems which each of the 3 groups of children and young people experienced were highlighted.

The effects of the care system are here described first because they influenced the experience of young people leaving care. By the late 1980s studies were describing the effects of homelessness on young people. A fourth group of homeless care leavers had a distinct experience influenced by care, leaving care and homelessness. Research identified them as a particular vulnerable group of homeless young people.

The personal effect of being in care

The available literature painted a cumulative picture of the difficulties of being in care, including the stigma of care, a feeling of powerlessness and having many changing relationships. In order to illustrate these points, Fisher et al (1986), Millham (1986),

Berridge and Cleaver (1987) all used case studies of young people as well as quantitative data. Accounts by Kahan (1979) and Mann (1984), which were based purely on case studies, were powerful in their descriptions of young people's views. However, in the case of Mann (1984), there was little evidence that these accounts were typical of a larger group.

Young people themselves began to voice their critical opinions about the care system. Initially this was through the Who Cares Group, which was supported by the National Children's Bureau and set up after a conference involving young people in 1975. The Who Care's Group became the National Association of Young People in Care (NAYPIC) in 1979. Through Who Cares and NAYPIC young people published their own views of the care system in the form of small reports (Page and Clark, 1977, Stein and Maynard, 1983 and NAYPIC 1983). Much of the evidence provided concentrated on residential care. The Who Cares magazine for children in care was first published by the National Children's Bureau and NAYPIC in 1987 and later became independent. It focused on the experience of children and young people, with the aim of giving them a voice and campaigning for improvements in the child care system (Who Cares Magazine, 1988). In this section quotes were selected which were able to illustrate a common point in the literature.

Page and Clark (1977) demonstrated that young people's difficulties began with their entry into care. They described how young people were made to feel personally responsible for coming into care.

"The first thing they ask you is 'what did you do',"

(Page and Clark, 1977 p.16)

Many young people felt that being in care was a stigma, for example, because of the reaction from other young people (Stein and Carey, 1986).

" All kids started making fun of you. 'Oh, where's your mam, where's your dad?' and I used to end up in quite a few fights cos of that. 'Oh she's one of the children's home lasses her, keep away from her, she's got nits' and things like that."

(Stein and Carey, 1986 p.46).

Once in care young people were placed in either foster care or residential children's homes. The research indicated that fostering was a complex experience for young people. In a study of long term foster care Triseliotis (1980) found that young people valued the warm and supportive care of foster parents.

"It has been such a happy life. I forgot all the previous upsets. I made roots...I grew up feeling this is home and this is where I belong."

(Triseliotis, 1980 p. 135)

Fostering was seen as a distinct advantage by young people who were able to become full family members. They expected to remain with foster parents for some time.

However, Triseliotis (1980) also demonstrated that long term fostering was not always a satisfactory experience, even when the placement had lasted many years. 20% of young people said their experience had been poor or very poor. In those cases they had not felt part of the family and contact with their own family was not encouraged.

Much of the initial research into fostering concentrated on the effect on younger children, as few teenagers were placed in foster care. It was likely that teenagers would experience additional difficulties when their demands on foster carers grew and where contacts with families were likely to exist. This was confirmed by Rowe et al (1989). The authors found that among fostered teenagers there were frequent changes of foster placements. Young people emphasised the difficulties of moving, as illustrated in this quote.

"It's the coming and going that hurts. The first time you move to another place it hurts bad so you build up a shell but one day the shell cracks."

(Page and Clark, 1977 p.29)

In the Who Cares report young people argued that it was not always clear who or what was responsible if a foster placement ended suddenly.

"I have had trouble trying to adapt when I have been fostered out. I am still a bit mixed up: Was it my fault that I didn't adapt to the family or was it the foster parents',"
(Page and Clark, 1977 p.46)

Stein and Carey (1986) pointed out that young people were likely to experience both fostering and residential care. The authors also described the positive experiences within residential care, growing up with friends and being cared for (Stein and Carey, 1986). There was also evidence that residential care placements could end in breakdowns (Rowe et al, 1989). Moving to different children's homes and having to adapt to new rules and staff members was identified as a problem by some young people.

"It were about 2 weeks before I knew all the rules. You pick things up anyway, and kids tell you, don't do that, you'll get into trouble,"
(Fisher et al, 1984 p.88)

Young people also criticised the way decisions were made and rules were set, and the quality of social work staff in residential care (Fisher et al, 1986; Page and Clark, 1977). Extracts from the Who Cares Group (1977) demonstrated that changing relationships made young people feel insecure and uncared for. It was difficult to assess those findings as they were based on a small and selected group.

The impact of the lack of stability in foster care was potentially made worse by the poor level of contact between children and their families. Some young people might not have had any stable relationships with a carer. Rowe et al (1984) suggested that not enough social work effort went into maintaining family links. The majority of children in care returned to live with their parents. Millham et al (1986) argued that despite this fact, family links tended to disintegrate during separation. 50% of young people had little or no contact with parents after 2 years. Maintaining contact with families is important in order to enable children to establish their identity, return home or receive support on leaving care. Yet the evidence indicated that good contact was rarely established. Thorpe (1974) emphasised the importance of maintaining contact between children in care and their birth family in order to ensure that children had a good understanding of their family history.

The Social Services Committee Report (1984) pointed out that for Black children lack of contact with birth families could lead to cultural isolation.

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Thorpe (1974) linked lack of contact with families to the difficulties young people had in establishing a positive identity for themselves.

Stein and Carey (1986) found that young people often had little knowledge about their family or the reasons for their reception into care.

"Yes. I feel I want to know me mother - who she is. I don't even know her name really. Don't even know me father's name. I know he is dead. Didn't find that out until I was about twelve or thirteen."

(Stein and Carey, 1986 p.33).

The issue of a lack of a positive identity was highlighted by black young people through the National Association of Young People in Care and the group, Black and In Care. Sissay (1984) described the negative effect that the loss of a sense of racial identity could have on young people, leading to cultural isolation and confusion as adolescents. Given this evidence and the lack of regular contact between children and their families in care, Stein and Carey (1986) argued that the formation of a positive identity was still a problem for children in care in the 1980s.

There was evidence in a small number of studies that young people in care suffered from low self esteem. Thorpe (1974) related this to the care experience, its stigma and the changes in placements.

"Everyone knew you were fostered...It makes you feel different and inferior. It made me curl up inside. I felt horrible. I think it does something to you."

(Thorpe quoted in Stein and Carey, 1986 p. 17)

Finally, self esteem could have been further undermined by the low educational achievements of young people in care which were reported by Burgess (1981), Triseliotis (1980), Stein and Carey (1986), Jackson (1987) and Aldgate et al (1989).

Education did not seem a priority for social workers, despite the fact that in 1986 there were 1,950 young people in care as a direct result of not receiving full time education (Children in Care in Local Authorities on 31.3.1986).

Only a few studies attempted to examine the long term psychological consequences of being in care. Lambert et al (1977) found that children in care were more likely to display 'anti social' behaviour and suggested that this was due to the difficulties the family experienced prior to children coming into care.

Social workers could have potentially played the role of a caring adult for those young people who had frequent changes in placement and poor family contact. Social workers were seen as a vital link between young people, their families and the care system. However, the quality of the relationship varied. Some young people built good and supportive relationships with workers, whilst others felt that they hardly had any contact (Stein and Carey, 1986, Who Cares, 1977). Whilst the academic literature focused on decision making processes, young people themselves highlighted the day to day impact of workers on their lives.

A related issue was young people's lack of involvement in decisions made by social services departments. In the 1970s, Page and Clark (1977) reported that a substantial number of young people were not involved in their 6 monthly review. Even in the 1980s, Stein and Carey (1986) argued that young people often attended only the last 10 minutes of a review and did not feel part of the decision making process. Organisations such as NAYPIC (National Association of Young People in Care) repeatedly demanded the right for young people to attend their reviews. In fact, attendance at a review, although important, could be a mere token unless a young person was adequately prepared and involved in decision making.

The personal experience of care leavers

There have been numerous studies into the experience of young people leaving residential care (Godeck, 1976; Porter, 1984; Lupton, 1985 and Morgan-Klein, 1985).

They pointed to the difficulties facing care leavers, such as unemployment, isolation, housing problems and debts. Triseliotis (1980) made the link between a negative experience of care and the process of leaving care. He found that those with a negative experience of foster care coped less well as adults with unemployment, housing difficulties and petty crime.

"Their general characteristics as a group were the absence of a settled way of life, unsteady employment record, economic dependence, no fixed address, and being in a continued state of transition...There was anger, disappointment and in some an element of desolation. They generally had a poor self image...the evidence seems to indicate where the foster home relationships break down in mid teens the chances of the young person subsequently leading a settled life are considerably reduced. "

(Triseliotis, 1980 p. 154)

There was no systematic analysis of the problem of leaving care until the late 1980s. However, in 1983-84 the Social Services Select Committee commented on the issue, based on evidence submitted by, for example, the National Association of Young People in Care, (1983).

"There is a serious problem of children leaving care faced with loneliness, homelessness and a sense of inadequacy."

(Social Services Select Committee, 1984)

The study by Stein and Carey (1986) was the first large scale project to examine the experience of a cohort of young people leaving residential and foster care. The findings of earlier studies were confirmed, but the authors also argued that care leavers were not an homogenous group.

There was evidence that most young people did not feel prepared to leave care (Morgan-Klein, 1985 p.37) and were worried and scared at the prospect. The following quotes were representative of the evidence provided.

"To tell the truth, I'm not going to know the first thing about going to live on my own. It's something I've never discussed. And I think something that we need to do while we're still in a children's home,"

(Page and Clark, 1977 p. 51)

"I'm just coming up to leaving care and I feel scared, even though I look forward to my freedom. I don't seem to know much about money or finding a place to live... I don't see my social worker often - he's too busy."

(Who Cares Magazine, 1989).

Even where plans were made for young people to move in an organised manner, they were aware of their limitations and the practical implications of leaving a safe placement.

"You have somebody to cook your meals. You have somebody who comes in and washes the dishes... and you find that you are not really doing anything for yourself...you rely on the staff for all sorts of things...But what happens when you leave here? I won't have all those things. I won't have a washing machine - I've got to learn what a laundrette's like,"

(Morgan-Klein, 1985 p.27).

A number of studies reported the limitations of preparation for leaving care in semi independence units. Morgan-Klein (1985) examined such units that were part of a residential setting. Young people gained some experience of independence but administrative considerations often interfered with life in the separate unit. For example, resource constraints meant that young people could not cook for themselves. There was confusion with food allowances for those relying on Supplementary Benefit. The units were still part of a children's home, on which young people could rely for resources, company and support. In addition, care leavers felt that they were only allocated a place in the unit if they 'behaved well'. Morgan-Klein argued this meant these units were used as a form of controlling young people's behaviour, rather than preparing them for leaving care, (Morgan-Klein, 1985 p.28-29). This seemed to apply especially to young women, who were moved out of units for much less severe behaviour than young men. As one of them commented,

"The first one out of it was A. She was a really good friend o' mine and she was moved back up because she came in half-an-hour late. But, I mean, now the boys give up cheek n' everything...Like X. He stole some money out of the students room and things like that. I mean he hasn't been moved up yet and he's been expelled from school...and A. was half-an-hour late an' she was moved up,"

(Morgan-Klein, 1985 p.29).

Housing was a major issue when moving into independence. It was often viewed as part of the preparation for leaving care. Even if a local authority allocated tenancies to care leavers, the quality of the accommodation could be poor (Stein and Carey, 1986; Porter 1984). As it was unplanned young people often had to make decisions over tenancies at short notice.

" They offered me one, but I wanted to have a look at it before I paid and it were a right dump so I thought they can nick...Oh but it were scruffy...I wou'n't put a dog in it."

(Stein and Carey, 1986 p.81).

Moving into independent accommodation, particularly a flat, was associated with isolation and loneliness.

"I remember when I first moved into my bedsit. It was winter and really cold. I just huddled round my small electric fire feeling very depressed. My fiancée used to come and see me a lot. He was the only person I had."

(Porter, 1984 p.19)

Isolation and loneliness, as well as inappropriate and unrealistic plans, were said to contribute to the frequent movement of young people after leaving care. Stein and Carey (1986 p. 78) found that 33% had moved at least 3 times in the first one and a half years.

Stein and Carey (1986) found that women were more likely to move to independent accommodation if they had a partner or a child.

Men lived predominantly with their family or foster family after leaving care. These findings corresponded with those of Jones (1987), who found that young women left home earlier than young men if they moved to live with a partner.

In addition to housing problems, budgeting and debts were cited by leaving care studies as posing serious difficulties for young people leaving care.

"But the most serious problem for all of them was budgeting, with some of the greatest difficulties experienced by the least independent, those with less control of their finances." (Stein and Carey, 1986 p. 88).

Mann (1984), Burgess (1981) and Triseliotis (1981) confirmed the poor training and employment record of most care leavers. This led to high levels of unemployment. Porter (1984, p.21) and Morgan-Klein (1985) found that 60% of care leavers were unemployed. Unemployed care leavers relied heavily on social security payments. The combination of a lack of budgeting skills and low income led to debts (Barnardos, 1989). Unemployment also meant having nothing to do and not feeling valued.

This was likely to further undermine self esteem.

"Yes, it gets me down a lot. Cos you know there's nowt to do and nowhere to go...you can't do a right lot without money...You get that bored and you end up tearing your hair out."

(Young man quoted in Stein and Carey, 1986 p.89)

Leaving care studies concentrated on the first 2 years after leaving care and it was not clear what long term employment prospects would be. Despite an increase in youth training, Morgan-Klein (1985) found that only 20% of care leavers had joined training schemes. Stein and Carey (1986) also found that few completed training placements.

In addition to housing problems and unemployment, most young people had little emotional and practical support after they left care. Mann (1984) reported that there was often some contact with families but it was not a close relationship.

Morgan-Klein (1985) stressed that, although some young people could stay with families temporarily, few returned home permanently. There was little indication that the extended family was able to provide housing and financial support. This was probably related to the lack of regular contact with families while in care. Those who had remained in a permanent family placement regarded their foster family as their family and received support and assistance from them.

Stein and Carey (1986) found that young people who established a relationship with a partner often experienced disruption and separation and few were able to maintain close friendships. Other studies, by Morgan-Klein (1985) and Porter (1984) did not even refer to the support of friends and partners. This demonstrated the lack of attention in the care and leaving care literature to the significance of friendship networks.

Stein and Carey (1986) pointed out that, in addition to the lack of support from family and friends, agency support was also variable. This meant that some care leavers were particularly isolated.

"I'd no back up, no support, no social worker, nobody visited me, none of that; all seemed to go at one time. Never heard no more...Everything just dropped and I didn't see anybody any more."

(Stein and Carey, 1986 p.119)

Isolation, depression and low self esteem featured in many of the comments by young people in the above study. This was likely to be related to the amount of disruption in their early childhood and in care. Housing problems and unemployment further contributed to depression and isolation. There was no indication that young people were suffering from mental illness or received psychiatric, psychological or counselling support. The literature focused on the impact of social policies on care leavers and it is possible that this emphasis accounted for the lack of reference to the psychological well-being of young people.

There was limited evidence that some young people were getting involved in criminal activities or had partners who were involved.

Stein and Carey (1986 p. 129) found that 18% of their sample were involved in criminal activities or with probation departments. There was no reference to drugs and prostitution within the literature although it was mentioned by the National Association of Young People in Care as a possible consequence of leaving care without support, (NAYPIC, 1983). It is possible that young people were reluctant to talk about such activities in interviews with researchers.

None of the studies examined the experience of young women in particular. Stein and Carey made occasional comparisons. They found that young women became parents earlier than young men and were more likely to move into independent accommodation. There was no analysis as to whether there were differences in the way men and women coped with independence, children or financial matters. There were no references to health issues or partnerships.

None of the samples included a significant number of Black young people. There were no references to their distinctive experience, and the issues of cultural identity and community links remained unexplored.

The effects of homelessness on individuals

After studies highlighted the difficulties of young people leaving care, reports into the effects of youth homelessness also emerged. In the early 1980s, the emphasis was on street homelessness. Beresford (1979) argued that public concern was aroused regarding the risks involved.

Apart from statistical reports, a number of eye witness accounts were published in the late 1980s. Studies by Saunders (1985) and Cosgrave (1988) concentrated on the quality of housing and the experience of Black young people. Beauchamp (1989) focused on the experience of a small group of rough sleepers and those in temporary hostels. Newman (1989) drew attention to young people who had run away. An account of the cumulative effects of homelessness was provided by O'Mahony (1988) and Randall (1988).

O'Mahony (1988) and Randall (1988) found that there was evidence of frequent use of temporary accommodation, unemployment, poor health and loneliness. None of the studies and reports examined the experience of young people in long stay hostels where support could have helped to avoid loneliness, find employment and gain skills in finding permanent housing.

Care leavers were also reported to become homeless. They were likely to be affected by homelessness in the same way as other young people. Thus, the effects described below apply equally to care leavers who became homeless. In addition, care leavers' self esteem, health, mental health and employment prospects could have been further undermined by their difficult home and care experience. None of the studies examined the particular characteristics of homeless care leavers and such assumptions would need to be investigated further.

"A failure to sustain a first tenancy for a care leaver can be very damaging to his or her self confidence, but the practical effects (homelessness) can be disastrous..."

(Abrahams and Mungall, 1989 p.10)

Once they had left home or care young people had to find somewhere to live. Many young people left in crisis and so turned to temporary accommodation, such as Bed and Breakfast establishments or hostels. O'Mahony (1988) pointed out that Bed and Breakfast establishments were expensive and restrictive.

"I can't stand having a landlord live on the premises, especially this one. He's rude to all my friends who call during the day, 'cos the knocking on the door interrupts his sleep,"

(Porter, 1984 p.18).

Young people who had recently left home or care were likely to have few independent living skills. Lupton (1985) and Saunders (1986) argued that living in Bed and Breakfast hotels prevented young people from gaining independent living skills, because of the lack of catering facilities. Young women were at risk of sexual harassment (Cosgrave, 1988).

If they could not find a Bed and Breakfast hotel, young people looked to hostels to provide them with accommodation. These could be short and long term and ranged from small shared houses to large dormitories (Randall, 1988, Saunders, 1986). Living in a hostel involved sharing facilities, often with a large number of other people. It restricted friendships and socialising. Furthermore, hostels offered only a temporary solution to homelessness, as most places were time limited.

"Hostels provide only a bandaid...plastering over the cracks...they can only be a temporary solution,"
(Saunders, 1986 p.31).

After the very temporary nature of Bed and Breakfast hotels and short term hostels, young people frequently had to move again. They looked to smaller specialist hostels if available. Housing workers visited the house and offered help with independent living skills, such as budgeting. Saunders (1986) suggested that small shared houses, referred to also as dispersed hostels, offered young people a breathing space and time to find permanent accommodation and employment.

Much of the hostel provision was used by men more than women. In London only 3,622 out of 22,424 bed spaces were for women (Young Homelessness Group, 1989). Organisations such as SHIL (Single Homeless in London) argued for better provision for women. In the late 1980s hostel provision for homeless young people was often fully occupied, particularly in London (Centrepont Soho, 1989, NCH 1990). Due to the high demands Centrepont Soho, reduced its upper age limit from 25 to 19 years in 1985. If hostels were fully occupied, young people were left with emergency nightshelters, whose reputation was poor. There were only shared rooms available and young people feared violence (Beauchamp, 1989). Many young people were reluctant to stay there and opted for sleeping rough.

This placed them at risk of physical attacks, exploitation and isolation (Beauchamp, 1989). There was evidence that young women were less likely to sleep rough than young men (Drake et al 1981, Randall, 1988). Instead women were more likely to stay with friends and family, making their homelessness less visible (Thornton, 1990).

O'Mahony (1988) was one of very few authors who examined the financial situation of homeless young people in detail. He argued that, in addition to living in temporary accommodation, moving frequently and sleeping rough, one of the major difficulties faced by homeless young people was getting money. In order to receive Social Security Benefits identifications had to be produced which only very few people without a fixed address possessed. As a result, people sleeping rough were not receiving state benefits. Randall (1988 p.30) reported that 75% of young women at the Centrepoin^t Soho nightshelter had no money and only 18% were receiving Supplementary Benefit. In order to gain income, many turned to begging and sometimes to petty crime (Beauchamp, 1989, O'Mahony, 1988).

Those who were forced into begging could be prosecuted. If unable to pay fines, they could be imprisoned. In 1989 there was a 400% increase in arrests and charges against young people under the 1824 Vagrancy Act resulting in 1396 convictions (Guardian, 14.5.1990). This Act was introduced in 1824 to deal with 'rogues and vagabonds' after the Napoleonic Wars. Organisations working with young people questioned the appropriateness of this.

"None of those convicted have the means to pay fines, and custody is an appalling punishment for homelessness. It ought not to be an offence to beg or sleep rough," (Harry Fletcher, assistant general secretary, NAPO in the Guardian, 14.5.1990).

The majority of homeless young people staying in hostels or sleeping rough were unemployed. Without an address they were unable to apply for jobs and could not be contacted for interviews. Furthermore, the continual cycle of worrying about where to sleep and how to obtain money and food resulted in many being unable to seek employment (Beauchamp, 1989, O'Mahony 1988). But without a job they did not have the money to gain accommodation.

Being homeless meant living on the margins of society. Young people were disenfranchised, because they did not have an address from which to register to vote but there was little evidence of this issue in studies of the time.

O'Mahony (1988) and Brandon et al (1980) were the main authors who stressed the difficulties of street homelessness for young people. Both argued that young people became socially isolated as they worried about how to cope for the next few hours. Research into leaving care showed that care leavers suffered from low self esteem due to their experience of care. This would have been exacerbated by the experience of homelessness.

"Loneliness, deprivation, sleeping rough, walking the streets feeling cold, down and out and inadequate, the shame of asking for help, the confusion and hostility of London, the suspicion of others who were homeless and the cost of food and accommodation...no friends... Worst of all you are alone and that brings with it an increasing sense of isolation."

(O'Mahony, 1988 p.31)

Hutson and Liddiard (1990) supported O'Mahony, pointing to the less tangible effects that were stressed by workers.

"Moreover several agency workers felt that the worst consequences of homelessness were the less tangible effects that such an experience can have on motivation and self respect and the resultant alienation from mainstream adult life."

(Hutson and Liddiard, 1990 p.173)

In addition to isolation and loneliness, many young people who were living in hostels and sleeping rough also had poor general levels of health. Randall (1988) reported that 73% of young people had sought the advice of a GP in the last 12 months. There was no breakdown according to gender and no specific information on the particular health issues relating to homeless young women.

Newman (1989) found that linked to poor health and isolation was the level of depression found among young women who had run away. In some cases depression had led to suicide attempts (Newman, 1989, CLASSAF 1989). The following quote was representative of young women's feelings about homelessness.

"I don't know why, but over the last couple of days I have been really unhappy. I think it's because at the age of 20 and being homeless, coupled with the fact that my family only want to know me if it's convenient to them. I just don't seem to be getting anywhere. Most of the time I feel that I have nothing to look forward to. Because as fast as I pick myself up, I get knocked down by another set-back. The only thing keeping me going is the thought that things are at their lowest, and they can only get better...I didn't eat today because I didn't feel like it,"

(20 year old woman, homeless for 11 months; CLASSAF, 1989 p. 25).

There was little evidence of regular drug and alcohol misuse among homeless young people. There was also little concrete evidence that young homeless people took drugs more than other young people. However, the effect of depression and poor health possibly may have contributed to drug abuse (Young Homelessness Group, 1989).

Young people, particularly women, living in temporary accommodation or on the streets were considered to be vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Newman (1989) found that 19 women at the Central London Teenage Project had been raped during their first few days in London, whilst 29% of the sample experienced sexual abuse at some time during their lives. In addition, they were vulnerable to attempts to push them into prostitution. This was supported by Randall (1989), who found that 1/3 of young women had been approached for prostitution since being homeless. Both samples by Randall and Newman were taken from newly homeless young people. These figures showed that they were particularly vulnerable to assaults and prostitution.

Homelessness among young women was likely to be concealed. In terms of Black young people, little was known about their distinct experience of homelessness. However, evidence was beginning to emerge that they were over represented among homeless young people in London (Cosgrave, 1988).

Social work practices and child care policies affecting children and young people

In addition to studies describing the effects of care and leaving care and homelessness, attempts were made to identify the policies and practices which led to the difficulties outlined above. Most of those were published throughout the 1980s. Particular emphasis was placed on social work practice related to children in care and leaving care. The development of social work practice and implications of the research are outlined first. In relation to youth homelessness, the focus is on government policy on housing, income and employment.

The child care policies and practices which affect young people

The Short Report (1984) summarised many of the criticisms made of the care system and social work practice. It argued that, apart from the need to protect children, better planning and decision making for those in care was required. Furthermore, social work should focus on more preventative work and on the reunification of children with their families where possible.

This view was supported by a series of studies funded by the Department of Health, which examined the care system and social work practice in the mid 1980s. Children in care were portrayed as victims of a failing system. The studies attempted to identify the factors which had led to such a poor experience. The aim was to inform and improve social work practice. This was followed by the inquiry reports into the deaths of Jasmine Beckford (1985) and Kimberlie Carlile (1987). Both highlighted the need for appropriate child protection procedures, better liaison between agencies and the need to consider the rights of children as well as parents. This section highlights only those areas of child care research which affected the process of leaving care.

The family background of children coming into care

In addition to general consideration of the care system, the family background of children coming into care was examined in the early 1980s. Studies highlighted children's already disadvantaged position in society before reception into care.

Family experience was likely to influence the way children dealt with coming into care. Triseliotis (1980) found that children in long term care came from families which had experienced disrupted relationships between parents, unemployment, homelessness and alcoholism.

This issue was taken further in a study by Bebbington and Miles (1989). They reported that the child's family background was an indicator of the risk of coming into care. Specific factors, such as a family's dependency on state benefit, living in a lone parent family, in privately rented housing and being a child of mixed heritage could disproportionately increase the likelihood of coming into care. Disrupted family relationships were also cited by Wedge and Phelan (1989) as leading to coming into care. As regards the characteristics of children coming into care, Packman (1986) argued that differences had to be recognised. She categorised children into 3 groups:

- victims of abuse or neglect, who were often younger children;
- volunteers whose parents were unable to look after them temporarily; and
- villains who tended to be teenagers with challenging behaviour and, in some cases, remanded by the courts (Packman, 1986 p.60-63).

Her chosen terms implied different perceptions of children in care. The term 'victim' implied that blame and responsibility was placed on the abuser, usually the family, in particular parent/s. Coming into care meant protection. Packman's use of the term villain, on the other hand, implied a criticism of young people's behaviour. There was a focus on criminal behaviour despite the fact that the overall admissions to care due to offending had decreased by 1986 (Children in Care of Local Authorities on 31.3.1986). In the majority of cases teenagers were in care because of challenging behaviour, which was likely to be related to family conflict (Rowe et al, 1989). Thus the responsibility for entry into care related to the family as a whole (Bebbington and Miles, 1989). But the perception of being 'villains' indicated that responsibility was placed mainly on young people themselves.

This could have reinforced young people's views that being in care 'was their fault'.

The differences among children coming into care also pointed to the different aims of the care system.

Packman (1986) argued that, if children were received into care due to abuse and were younger, then the aim of the care system was to provide long term stability and protection. Those received into care as teenagers due to challenging behaviour were likely to find that care was to control and socialise them into acceptable norms and values. The literature did not examine the long term effect on young people of having been abused or subjected to family conflict.

Permanency Planning

Given disrupted family backgrounds of abuse, neglect and conflict, the permanency movement highlighted two needs in the 1980s. Firstly, authors, such as Maluccio et al (1986) and Thoburn (1986) argued for permanent family placements for children who were in care long term to provide care and stability. This would be of particular importance for children who had been victims of abuse and where there was no plan for them to return home. Secondly, better decision making and planning for all children in care was required. As part of good planning, the permanency movement also emphasised the need for effective work with parents to enable children to return home. Yet, in the main, once children were admitted to care and remained for more than 6 weeks, they were unlikely to return home (Millham et al, 1986).

"Researchers and commentators from within as well as outside the child care system have been increasingly critical of the lack of effective planning for children in care - a lack which reflects failures in decision making at many stages of the children's care careers," (Packman, 1986 p.3)"

The effect of the permanency movement was a renewed emphasis on foster care, beginning in the mid 1980s. With the increase in fostering, the service and practice of foster carers was reviewed. Studies into foster care criticised the exclusive model of fostering for discouraging family links (Triseliotis, 1980), as well as the lack of training and specialist skills of foster carers (Berridge and Cleaver, 1987).

The Department of Health funded a comprehensive study of some 6000 children who had been placed in foster or residential care.

The study, published by Rowe et al (1989), was the first detailed comparison of the two forms of care. The authors found that more foster than residential placements broke down, but that foster care was more likely to achieve the placement's aims. They distinguished between placements lasting as long as they were needed and placements lasting as long as they were planned. Overall, a quarter of all residential and foster placements for young people over the age of 11 did not last as long as they were needed. More foster placements ended before they were planned to end. But more foster placements also lasted as long as they were needed (17%, Rowe et al, 1989p.59). The distinction was useful as it highlighted the complex task of defining a placement breakdown. Young people aged 14-15 (not in residential care) were most likely to be placed in specialist foster homes with the aim of preparation for independence, treatment and assessment. Given the complexity of these tasks, success was difficult to achieve. There were no detailed findings as to whether the differences in breakdown rates related to the reason for coming into care.

Contact with families

Milham et al (1986) examined the reasons for the poor contact between children in care and their families. They reported that certain factors hindered contact. These included the distance of the care placement from home, frequent changes in placement, the attitude of the foster family and lack of contact between social workers and families. Failure to maintain contact meant that children were unable to rebuild relationships with parents if there had been family conflict. If contact remained poor, then young people were unlikely to receive support when they left care.

The reasons for young people's poor educational performance

By the late 1980s, Jackson (1987) and Aldgate et al (1989) investigated the reasons for the low educational achievements of children in care. Jackson (1987) identified the number of placement moves and the general low priority which education received within the care system. In a study of the educational achievements of children in care, Aldgate et al (1989) compared their results to a control group of young people not in care but in contact with social services.

This group was chosen because the authors argued that earlier studies had compared children in care with children who achieved average educational qualifications. Such a comparison ignored the impact of the child's background and family. In fact, the authors found that educational achievements for both groups were low. Thus the study concluded, that despite the better home environment of children in foster care, they were still showing low educational attainment. This was unlikely to be due to lack of attention by foster carers.

"The explanation may lie for example in the social disadvantage and trauma experienced by the foster children before coming into care, their ...educational disruption once in care, or the continuing stresses and uncertainty..."

(Aldgate et al, 1989 p. 459).

Poor educational achievements would have an impact on young people's career prospects and could have contributed to poor levels of self esteem.

The psychological explanations for children's difficulties in care

The sociological and social work studies concentrated on the processes children and young people experienced in care such as the entry into care and foster home breakdowns. A small number of psychological studies attempted to examine the consequences of these experiences for individual children. Although a number of factors were identified little is known about the importance of each individual one.

Schaffer (1990), reviewing the literature, found that there were a multitude of factors which influenced the psychological well-being of children and young people. This included the nature of the family experience, the parent-child relationship, the reasons for coming into care as well as being in care itself. He believed that there was some consensus that children described as 'social' and 'easy' as babies, those with educational achievements and a supportive family displayed better psychological functioning as adults even if they had been in care. However, in general individual factors which could predict social adjustment had not yet been identified.

"Even in the face of considerable trauma, there are survivors as well as victims...there are hints in research findings that responsiveness may vary from one situation to another, depending on the kind of stress to which the child is exposed to."

(Schaffer, 1990 p. 214)

Although Schaffer's review was useful in providing a summary, much of the research applied to the 1970s and to young children in residential care. Psychological studies did not explain the impact of changing relationships on adolescents who had already experienced family disruption. If the findings of earlier studies were applied to young people who experienced frequent foster home disruptions, it is likely that teenagers in care would be adversely affected by frequently changing relationships. Furthermore, one would expect differences among young people taking account of race and gender. More studies would be necessary to assess the psychological effects of being in care and examine the causes and consequences.

Children Act 1989

Taking account of the evidence provided by research and practitioners, the Children Act 1989 was seen as an opportunity to provide a completely new framework for child care legislation. Implemented in October 1991, it aimed to dispel negative perceptions about young people in care. In future young people would be referred to as 'looked after' rather than 'in care'. There would be a strong emphasis on young people's participation in decision making processes, children's rights, complaints procedures and consultation. This would also require major changes in social work practice and attitudes, treating young people as partners rather than clients.

The Children Act 1989 was welcomed by social services departments and voluntary child care organisations. These organisations (for example, First Key, Barnardos, National Children's Home, the National Association of Young People in Care) had been campaigning for a higher profile for the issue of leaving care. For the first time local authorities would have to ensure preparation and planning for leaving care (Children Act 1989, Section 24 (1)) and there was a duty to advise and befriend young people who had been in care up to the age of 21 (Section 24 (2)).

However, local authorities were given only a power to offer financial and material support to young people leaving care (Section 24 (6-8)). The Guidance Notes published by the Department of Health (1990) outlined in detail good practice recommendations in the area of leaving care. For example, issues such as preparation, planning and after care support, as well as non professional support, were addressed. Overall, the guidance was a good practice guide rather than a statutory instrument. Pressure groups felt that the Act fell short of providing an effective safety net (Abrahams and Mungall, 1989). Furthermore, social services departments feared that the lack of resources would severely curtail their ability to meet all the new responsibilities. Research by Bonnerjea (1990) found that 12 months before implementation most social services departments had not yet established effective leaving care policies and services. There were fears that these would not be in place ready for implementation.

Leaving care policy and practice

Stein and Carey (1986) and Stein (1990) were the first to argue that leaving care, like becoming an adult, was a social and psychological process, taking a number of years and involving degrees of independence. Therefore, both the law and social work practice was required to recognise the need for individualised preparation and on-going support.

As a result of the above study and evidence provided by the National Association of Young People in Care and First Key, the issue of preparation for leaving care was emerging as a concern.

In response there was a relative sudden increase in specialist projects and courses for care leavers beginning in the mid 1980s (Stone, 1990). Most of those initiatives were local and run by voluntary organisations.

By the late 1980s there was also an increasing emphasis in local authorities on strategic planning for child care services (Bonnerjea, 1990). Although social services departments had established policies and procedures for the reception of children and young people into care and whilst in care, very few had established leaving care policies. Hence, leaving care services differed throughout the country (Bonnerjea, 1990).

Bonnerjea (1990) suggested that leaving care policies should aim to prevent homelessness, unemployment and instability for care leavers, so reducing the likelihood of them seeking services in future. This would have been a possible consequence of an effective policy. However, the predominant reason for having leaving care policies was likely to be the statutory requirement to do so under the Children Act 1989. Responsibility for monitoring leaving care, including expenditure, could be found at any level within a department. Only few departments had policies for young women with children leaving care and Black young people (Bonnerjea, 1990). Stone (1990) argued this was also the case for many leaving care schemes. This lack of policy and procedure was in striking contrast to child protection procedures which were highly structured and showed much more consistency. This was an indication that leaving care remained, in comparison, a marginal issue.

Preparation and after care approaches and services

Despite the lack of local authority leaving care policies, there was a substantial increase in leaving care schemes by the late 1980s.

Maureen Stone (1990) evaluated a total of 39 projects. She found only one scheme that had been running for more than 10 years, with 82% developed since 1985 (Stone, 1990 p.1). The majority of schemes were managed by voluntary or housing organisations, with only 4 managed by social services departments (Stone, 1990 p.5).

Their approaches differed (Stone, 1990, Stein and Carey, 1986), as each was based on a set of beliefs as to how young people made the transition to adulthood and what key skills would be required. In order to show the differences here, the various approaches identified in the literature have been grouped under the following headings:

- The independence approach
- The fieldwork approach
- Leaving care as a transition

The independence approach

A number of projects concentrated on an approach to leaving care which could be described as the 'independence approach'.

Embedded within this was a belief that above all, young people lacked the practical skills and experience required to leave care successfully. This approach was based on the premise that those skills could be learned in a few weeks or months. Young people were asked to participate in 'training programmes' or courses which were often time limited. Issues such as budgeting, benefits and practical domestic skills were addressed in a series of sessions. This was referred to by Stein and Carey (1986) as the 'domestic combat course'. Sessions were predominantly worker led, following a pre-set agenda.

In making referrals to projects, social workers often specified independence training in particular. Young people valued this service because they saw practical skills as important (Stone, 1990 p.45).

However, a number of problems were identified with this approach.

Firstly, it associated leaving care with becoming independent and self sufficient. Partridge (1989) argued that this did not reflect the reality for young people of living within a community and depending on the help of others. Secondly, the approach assumed that independence and leaving care were synonymous with achieving certain practical skills.

"In its denial of a young person's psycho-social transition from being a young person to becoming an adult. It requires taking on responsibilities and freedoms in individual measures - learned through risk taking and the opportunity to make mistakes...Such skills are learned over a period of years,"

(Partridge, 1989)

Thirdly, the emphasis on courses implied that young people were a homogenous group who could be taught a set number of skills appropriate to all. Fourthly, Grosskurth (1984) highlighted the perception that projects only took those who were most able. Finally, it could be argued that an emphasis on practical skills paid too little attention to skills, such as maintaining relationships with others, decision making skills and taking responsibility for one's own actions. Within this tradition a number of authorities developed specialist

placements preparing young people for leaving care, such as half way houses, specialist fostering schemes, lodgings placements and preparation units as part of children's homes.

The Fieldwork Approach

Here, allocated social workers incorporated the planning and preparation for leaving care in their day to day case work. It was reviewed mainly through child care reviews.

Bonnerjea (1990) found that support was provided until the end of either the care order or voluntary care with little after care support. Workers intervened over particular issues but did not necessarily follow a planned programme of visits or skills training. The content was largely at the discretion of workers. Staff were also responsible for referrals to other specialist projects or accommodation providers.

Workers found it beneficial if one person was responsible for a case. However, after a case was closed, any after care issues were likely to be dealt with by the duty system. The young person would probably not have been known to the worker on duty. Stein (1990) criticised the approach as it provided workers with a lot of discretion and could lead to large variations in the planning and preparation for care leavers.

"Field social workers are too busy to give the amount of support needed and residential workers' priorities are their own young people, still living in their homes,"
(Stein, 1990 p.63)

Bonnerjea (1990) added that there could be confusion if responsibility for work was shared with residential workers. In the absence of additional resources, the actual cost of leaving care work was hidden in day to day work and expenditure. There was little evidence that workers focused on inter-personal and decision making skills. This model was mainly used to support young people in local authorities where there were no specialist leaving care services,. Bonnerjea (1990) reported that in 1990 this model was used by half the London boroughs.

Leaving care as a transition

Stein (1990) found that some leaving care projects rejected the independence approach. Such projects believed that leaving care was a transition, not related to age but to a young person's personal development. Support and advice should, therefore, be offered on a task centred basis.

This approach emphasised the involvement of young people in decision making processes and did not expect that all young people would have the same needs (Kirkless Project, Bradford reported in Grosskurth, 1984).

In assessing the literature, 2 different models within this approach were found:

- the specialist team model and
- the social action model.

The specialist team model

Workers believed that care leavers needed ongoing support to manage the transition to adulthood. Preparation and after care was delivered by specialist projects offering a key worker system, group work, counselling, accommodation and advice. The work was holistic, addressing some practical issues. It concentrated on, for example, inter-personal skills and taking responsibility as well as the impact of having been in care, health matters and self confidence. Young people were supported for a significant period of time.

The work was worker led, with tight referral procedures, reviews and admission criteria, through which young people committed themselves to the scheme.

Stein (1990) argued that this approach recognised differences among young people in their personal development and needs.

"There is also a need to assist young people towards developing their own potential, helping them to recognise their qualities and to develop confidence in themselves as responsible adults. We need to help them to recognise that they have both the capacity and responsibility to take charge of their own lives."

(Stein, 1990 p.14)

The author also reported comments by practitioners, who felt that young people became dependent on the service due to the offer of open ended involvement.

"He has lost ambition as far as accommodation is concerned. He should have moved on ages ago...I don't think the project is doing enough to help him move on. He...has become dependent upon Barnardos. He has a status which he likes."

(Stein, 1990 p. 35)

The model also meant that extra resources had to be found and sustained, which few local authorities said they could afford. Bonnerjea (1990) thought that there was potential for confusion. Services were provided by allocated local authority case workers and specialist teams. Not every social worker would refer young people and not all young people would benefit.

The projects tight referral criteria left the control over the process with workers and gave young people less involvement in the after care process. Furthermore, there was a danger that young people would commit themselves to the project in order to get access to accommodation. Once placed, they might have found it difficult to accept the system of keyworking and reviews.

The social action model

Stein (1990 p.42) found that this approach developed within the specialist team approach. Workers were concerned that the service provided by specialist teams was worker led and did not encourage young people to take control of the leaving care process themselves. The model believed that workers should facilitate a process during which young people identified issues which they wished to address. Particular emphasis was placed on assisting young people to identify and challenge their position in society. Teams delivered services through group work rather than on an individual basis. There was a commitment to gaining self confidence and negotiation skills. Access to projects was often open, although referral systems operated in some areas. Services offered included advice and information, drop-ins for support, and access to independent accommodation.

This model benefited from placing young people at the centre of decision making processes and ensured a high rate of user involvement. But, there was a danger that projects were not able to support all young people due to increasing numbers. Limited resources meant that young people were often unable to return to the project once they had left. The emphasis on developing negotiation skills, through discussion, could lead to those, who were less able to articulate their wishes, not being heard.

Despite the limitations of the independence approach, many young people needed help with domestic and budgeting skills. The leaving care as a transition approach was in danger of overlooking these skills.

One has to recognise that all the approaches outlined above have been analysed here in an ideal form. In fact, the concept of independence has to be seen as a continuum from complete physical, social and economic dependency to complete independence from any other person. Similarly, the approach of leaving care projects has to be recognised to exist on a continuum, from the independence approach on the one end, to open ended on-going leaving care support at the other end. Mike Stein (1990), in his analysis of the Leeds Leaving Care Team, found that their work changed over a period of time, from the provision of a specialist service towards a social action approach. Thus, the analysis is able to place projects somewhere along the continuum.

There was little reference to gender differences in the analysis of leaving care approaches or policies. This point was also made by Stone (1990).

"None of the 39 Leaving Care Schemes in the research study seemed to have a policy towards young women's problems. Girls housing, employment and relationship problems were understood and responded to within an individual pathology model. The issue of teenage pregnancy and motherhood among girls leaving care is a case in point."
(Stone, 1990, p. 58)

Stone only commented on the need to address women's issues in the area of potential problems. This prevented general recognition of young women's experiences of, for example, leaving care, health and relationships.

Using Bonnerjea's data (1990) it is likely that by 1990 the majority of leaving care preparation and support was still the responsibility of field workers.

Assessment of the impact of government policy in housing, welfare benefits, education, training and employment on the transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood incorporates 3 key processes, leaving home and moving into independent housing, entering employment and managing an income and becoming a parent. For the majority of young people the process from youth to adulthood is complex, (Hutson and Jenkins, 1989) with different transitions entered at different times in their lives. These transitions are also likely to interact with each other. In contrast to the majority of young people, the transition of care leavers is accelerated. They enter all the transitions when the care order expires or they move into independence, sometime between the ages of 16 and 18. Furthermore, by the age of 20 a large number will have been living independently and become a parent.

Throughout the 1980s, government policies which affected young people increased. Organisations such as the Young Homelessness Group (1984), Centrepont Soho (Randall, 1988,1989) and Barnardos, (1989) argued that particular policies in employment, housing and social security were aimed at increasing young people's dependency on their family. If young people remained at home their transition to adulthood was likely to have been delayed. If young people had to leave home or had to leave care, then the transition to adulthood was not delayed. For these young people the adverse effect of social policies undermined their ability to maintain housing and employment successfully, as they could become homeless, unemployed and faced with debts if they did not have family support.

Care leavers, with a disrupted childhood and adolescence and without family support, were particularly vulnerable. It is possible that some young women who had been unemployed and/or were care leavers looked to parenthood for increased adult status.

In the leaving care literature, only Stein and Carey (1986) and Stein (1990) made the connection between leaving care and becoming an adult. Care leavers are forced to be independent and take responsibility for finding and maintaining accommodation, caring for children and managing an independent income.

They have adult responsibilities but they do not fulfil traditional adult roles like being a worker, parent and householder successfully. Successful fulfilment of these roles gives recognition of achievements and, therefore, adult status. Failure to fulfil all roles successfully could question young people's adult status but this point was not explored in the literature. Most of the available literature related to the experience of young people in general, but the relevance to the process of leaving care is highlighted.

The Legal Definition of Adulthood

There is a strong relationship between the legal definition of leaving care and adulthood. Both equate maturity and adult rights and responsibilities with the age of 18. However, the legal definition of adulthood is confused as adult rights are acquired over a period of years. At the age of 18 young people can vote, enter legally binding agreements, hold a mortgage and own or buy property. They can serve on a jury, make a will, marry without parental consent and buy and drink alcohol in public. They can also join the army without parental consent and, if legally adopted, see their birth certificate. However, young people cannot stand as a parliamentary candidate until the age of 21. Other rights are given at the age of 16, when young people can enter heterosexual relationships, marry and leave home with parental consent. The process of leaving care is also spread over a number of years. Care orders are legally discharged at the age of 18. Yet most care leavers are likely to live independently before the age of 18. The confusion becomes apparent when considering those running away from care. Although they should be reported as missing, it is likely that those over the age of 16 and living independently will not be sought by police authorities or forced to return (Newman, 1989, O'Mahony, 1988).

Responsibility and Independence

Hutson and Jenkins (1989) argued that the legal definition of adulthood is too narrow and needs to include the concepts of responsibility and independence as central aspects of how adult roles are fulfilled.

"The importance of 'responsibility' - the accepting of responsibility for oneself or for others, the exhibition of responsible behaviour - should not be underestimated...(and) is a core component of adulthood...There is, however, another theme in this material; related to the notion of responsibility there is an emphasis upon 'independence', of both thought and deed...Independence involves, minimally, the assumption of responsibility for oneself...it is typically degrees of responsibility and independence which are expected and attainable."

(Hutson and Jenkins, 1989, p.89-90)

Stein and Carey (1986) criticised the concept of independence as it did not exist in reality as each person is in some way dependent upon others which was acknowledged by the authors (Hutson and Jenkins, 1989).

The concept of responsibility for oneself and one's actions is useful as it indicates that young people become adults even if they do not fulfil all adult roles, for example, of being a wage earner or householder as is the case for most care leavers. Hutson and Jenkins related 'independence' to actions, ideas and income. This highlights the gradual process of becoming an adult, as young people can take on degrees of responsibility and independence, learning to fulfil new roles. In the case of care leavers, it is less likely that the process of becoming an adult will be gradual, as their discharge from care forces independence and responsibility onto them. Thus, in comparison to other young people, their transition is accelerated.

Although personal skills such as having and exercising responsibility and independence are important they are not a sufficient definition of adulthood.

Leaving home and moving into independent housing

Leaving Home and the risk of homelessness

Leaving home is a normal process entered by most young people sooner or later, in their transition to independent housing. If young people leave home to marry or enter education or employment, their access to housing is usually planned and provided. Those who leave home for other reasons are at risk of becoming homeless.

Laslett (1971) found that in the 17th century, leaving home was related to the age at which young men and women left home for work, entered marriage and established an independent household. Whilst working as servants or workmen, housing was tied to occupation. Marriage usually led to permanent housing. Until the 1970s the process of leaving home and securing permanent housing could take several years.

Wall (1978) and Leonard (1980) argued that by the 1970s the gap between leaving home, marriage and setting up a new home had narrowed to one year for most people. Marriage would not be planned until the couple had found a home.

Jones (1987) took the link between leaving home, entering work and marriage further in a more sophisticated analysis. She (1987) found that the average age at which young people left home was 21 years for women and 23 years for men. Using earlier research by Young (1984), she showed that living independently could be transitional for some young people. In particular, leaving home was influenced by access to educational opportunities and by young people's class position. Women under the age of 20 and men under 21 years left home primarily to take up employment or enter higher education. In this transitional stage they were likely to share accommodation with peers in work or education and were also likely to return home. Most working class women did not leave home until their mid twenties. They left to marry and this was the final move from home. At this stage they would rent a council house or buy a property, if they had the necessary income. Only 6% of working class women under 20 years of age lived in permanent housing on their own (Jones, 1987 p.87). This was supported by earlier research by Marton quoted in Leonard (1980).

"Only about 40,000 of the 3.7 million adults living independently are under 20 and most of these are students in digs; only about 360,000 are even aged 20 - 30 although there are 2.6 million single people in this age group - and 5 million married people with houses of their own."

(Marton, quoted in Leonard, 1980 p.51).

There was no evidence of youth homelessness in this study by Jones (1987). The majority of 16 and 17 year olds were living at home. Her sample did not include those young people who left home for reasons other than education, employment or marriage.

Studies into youth homelessness also examined the reasons for and the way in which young people left home. A comparison of the work of Jones (1987) and, for example, Randall (1989) showed differences between young people seen by homelessness agencies in the late 1980s and the majority of young people living at home. Young people at emergency hostels were younger and had left home because of family conflict. Geoff Randall (1989), in a report for Centrepont Soho, found that 44% had left their last accommodation because of arguments or being told to leave. The majority of these were likely to be leaving the family home. A Welsh study into youth homelessness by Hutson and Liddiard (1990 p.171) found that 50% of the sample were homeless after experiencing family problems. Randall (1989) reported that many young people had left home before they were 18 years old.

"...there are increasing numbers of young people at the Night Shelter who have been forced to leave their previous home and who have been homeless for a longer period."
(Randall, 1989 p.12)

Similarly, Stein and Carey (1986) found that care leavers moved into independence before the age of 18. Moving into independence at an earlier age than the majority of young people accelerated the move into independent housing.

Because relationships with parents were often poor, homeless young people, like care leavers, were unable to return home.

In contrast to Jones (1987), Randall (1989 p.11-16) reported that only 6% of young people said that they returned home, although 42% gave the parental home as their last settled base. Only 2% felt able to return to relatives after having been homeless. Stein and Carey (1986) also found that care leavers could not return home to live.

O'Mahony (1988), Drake et al (1981) and Thornton, (1990) attempted to explain the reasons for increased family conflict. They pointed to the rise in the divorce rate and step parent families, leading to conflict. This increased the pressure on young people having to leave home. Although these were likely factors leading to family conflict, few studies were detailed enough to pursue this point any further.

Housing Policy

By the early 1980s young people were at risk of homelessness if they left home for reasons other than employment, education or marriage. This applied to all young people leaving care, whose care orders expired or who left foster or residential care unplanned. At the time, the literature argued that young people leaving home or care could become homeless because of the structure of the housing market and housing policy. Once homeless, it was difficult to find permanent housing.

The Homelessness Legislation and the Children Act 1989

Having left home or care young people, unable to find temporary housing, could theoretically approach local authorities, who had a responsibility towards homeless people. However, the Housing (Homeless Person) Act 1977 had effectively excluded the majority of young single people from being housed as homeless by local authorities. Campaign groups such as the Young Homelessness Group, which was formed in 1984, consistently challenged the legislation (YHG 1985). There was some recognition by the government that young single people were vulnerable if they had nowhere to live. In the 1980s Guidance on the Housing (Homeless Persons') Act 1977 spelt out that homeless young people at risk of financial and sexual exploitation should be considered to be in priority need of housing under 'any other special reason'.

This was further defined by the courts to mean that he or she 'is less able to fend for himself or herself so that injury or detriment will result' (Thornton, 1990). In the 1985 the case, *R v Monklands DC*, the court ruled that exploitation did not have to have taken place, but that a young person's age, lack of income and lack of family support could be sufficient indicators of vulnerability.

Nonetheless, a survey by SHAC (Single Homeless Advice Centres) found that 35% of local authorities did not accept a young person at risk of financial or sexual exploitation as vulnerable (Thornton, 1990 p.53). Abrahams and Mungall (1989, p.7) found that 42% of local authorities would not house a single applicant who was homeless because of serious family conflict, 18% would do so. 22% of local authorities would not house a woman under 18 years old and open to sexual or financial exploitation. The authors commented that local authorities were ignoring the vulnerability of many homeless young people.

"In each case it would be reasonable to suggest that the specified circumstance should put HA on notice that the applicant may be vulnerable. For example, young people who have no family and no support are likely to be isolated and thus more open to exploitation by adults."

(Abrahams and Mungall, 1989 p.7-8)

In 1985, the 1977 Housing (Homeless Person's) Act became Part 3 of the new Housing Act 1985. Neither young single people nor care leavers were considered to be a priority need category. Abrahams and Mungall (1989 p.11) found that only 19% of local authorities would find care leavers who were homeless to be in priority need under the Housing Act Part III 1985.

The authors (1989) concluded that the majority of young single homeless people would not be housed under the Act, because of local authorities' lack of resources and the absence of an effective appeals procedure.

"The pressure being exerted on councils from homeless families is so overwhelming that many housing associations are now approaching the 'vulnerable for some other special reason' criterion pragmatically. Instead of assessing the needs of young single applicants objectively they are looking at the resources they have available."

(Abrahams and Mungall, 1989 p.12)

Due to an increase in youth homelessness by the late 1980s, youth homelessness was implicitly recognised in Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Local authorities would have a duty to accommodate children over the age of 16 who requested it and were found to be 'in need'.

"Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who has reached the age of 16 and whose welfare is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him with accommodation."

(Section 20(3))

'In need' was further defined as:

"(a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part;

(b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services; or

(c) he is disabled.

(Section 17 (10))

Organisations such as CHAR (Downey, 1990) argued that young people under the age of 18 who were homeless should be assessed as 'in need'. CHAR recognised the detrimental effects of homelessness in preventing young people from reaching a reasonable standard of health and development.

Local authority social services departments could request the help of housing departments in the fulfilment of their duties under the Children Act 1989 (Downey, 1990), by housing care leavers and other young people assessed as in need. However, housing departments only had to co-operate if to do so did not conflict with their statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1985. Unfortunately, as Downey (1990) pointed out, the definition of 'in need' under the Children Act 1989 and 'vulnerable' under the Housing Act 1985 were not synonymous. This led to confusion and differences in interpretation.

12 months before the Act took effect Downey (1990) feared that there would not be adequate resources for its implementation and that homeless 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers would not be housed.

Housing association and local authority tenancies

If young people and care leavers were not housed through homelessness legislation or the Children Act 1989, they could also apply for housing association and local authority tenancies. However, through the 'right to buy' scheme local authority housing stock had decreased. This made securing council housing competitive. Only those whose housing need was seen as greatest were housed by local authorities.

The Housing Act 1980 set out tenants' 'right to buy'. Local authority tenants could buy their rented property at a discount of up to 50%. The aim was to increase owner occupation through the sale of local authority housing stock. By the late 1980s, about 20% of the public sector stock had been transferred into owner occupation and it was predominantly good quality stock (Ginsbury 1989). Furthermore, as the role of local authorities as property developers was firstly restricted and later ended, council house building declined during the 1980s. Net housing investment spending was 43% less in 1986/87 than 1978/79 (Thornton, 1990). The 1987 White Paper on Housing set out the government's agenda of increasing home ownership and reducing investment in housing. The role of local authorities would be purely to enable the development of social housing. Watson (1988) argued that this reduction in public sector stock, due to the lack of new build and the sale of stock, made access to housing more competitive. Housing associations were unable to meet the shortfall in housing,

providing only 2.6% of housing stock in 1988 (Housing and Construction Statistics, 1966-1988). The remaining stock of local authorities and housing associations was allocated through waiting lists. Young people could register on these for housing. In most local authorities the waiting list was organised through a points system, based on measuring those in greatest housing need.

A study by Prescott-Clarke, Allen and Morrissey (1988) of local authority housing waiting lists, found that local authorities used a great deal of discretion in defining housing need. Each agency set its own priorities and need was generally based on the quality and tenure of current accommodation, health, income and age of the applicant, the existence of a local connection and the number of dependants. Venn (1985) argued that, although single people accounted for the largest group of housing waiting list applicants in some areas, they were least likely to be housed through the points system. This was because of the weighting given to dependants and the quantity of family housing stock compared to single person's stock. Venn (1985) found that young single people were more likely to be excluded because some local authorities set a minimum age for council housing at 18 or 21 years of age. Although housing associations had more discretion in allocating tenancies, most were set up to serve particular client groups. By the late 1980s, McKecknie (1987) reported for Shelter that local authorities and housing associations had increased waiting lists. O'Mahony (1988) argued that this made it even less likely that young people would gain access to council housing. Lupton (1985) and Abrahams and Mungall (1989) found that many care leavers also did not get access to council or housing association tenancies, because of the pressure on stock and waiting lists.

In some geographical areas young people were allocated council housing because they were assessed as vulnerable or were care leavers (Stein and Carey, 1986). But those who were housed by local authorities were often in danger of losing a first tenancy. Available properties were in hard to let areas, as much of the good quality accommodation was likely to have been transferred to private ownership. Abrahams and Mungall (1989) and Stein and Carey (1986) reported that care leavers were likely to move again if they were dissatisfied with their accommodation.

Furthermore, O'Mahony (1988) pointed out that care leavers found it difficult to cope with bills at the age of 17 and 18, when most of their peers would be living at home. If evicted because of rent arrears, the local authority housing department would consider young people as intentionally homeless and were under no obligation to provide future tenancies (Abrahams and Mungall, 1989).

"Loneliness, the stress of living in frequently poor quality accommodation...often resulted in young (people) either relinquishing their first tenancy themselves or being evicted for the accumulation of rent arrears...the practical effects can be disastrous. For in those cases a young person would almost certainly be deemed to have made herself/himself intentionally homeless, with the result that the Housing Authority would owe no duty to provide permanent accommodation,"
(Abrahams and Mungall, 1989 p.10).

The Private Rented Sector

Lupton (1985) pointed out that, because they were not allocated social housing, the majority of young people and care leavers had to rely on other forms of temporary and insecure housing, particularly in the private sector. However, the shortage of private rented stock also made finding accommodation difficult. The General Household Survey (1986) demonstrated that many single people, particularly women, were renting in the private sector. 60% of single women were living in rented accommodation, compared with 30% of married households (General Household Survey, 1986, Social Trends 1988). However, during the 20th century, private rented housing stock continually declined, from 90% in 1914 to 7.3% in 1988 (Housing and Construction Statistics, 1966-1988).

Thornton (1990) and Ginsbury (1989) argued that, in addition to the lack of stock, the 1988 Housing Act led to higher rents and insecurity of tenure in the private sector. This meant that young people either could not afford the accommodation or had to move more frequently. Under the previous fair rent scheme, tenants could ask the fair rent officer to assess the rent for a property in the private sector. If it was found to be too high, the rent officer could force a landlord to lower it.

Under the 1988 Act, landlords were able to set market rents under an assured or assured shorthold tenancy. The regulatory role of the fair rents officer was abolished. Thus, tenants were likely to be paying higher market rents in future. Assured shorthold tenancies reduced the security of tenure in the private sector to 6 months. Thornton (1990) reported that young people would be adversely affected if they could not afford to pay rising rents. The lack of security of tenure would lead to them having to move frequently.

"A switch by landlords to short term tenancies has made it very hard for young single people to obtain accommodation, and even if successful security is often limited to 6 months or 1 year,"

(Thornton, 1990 p.14)

If care leavers did not have access to council housing, they also relied on the private rented sector, but few were able to afford rising rents.

"Very few of the 70 care leavers were able to find decent and affordable accommodation in the private sector... "

(Abrahams and Mungall, 1989 p.9)

Lupton (1985) reported that those who found accommodation were likely to be renting in Houses in Multiple Occupation, of which up to 80% could be in a poor state of repair.

Although the importance of the private sector was outlined in the housing research (Thornton 1990, O'Mahoney, 1988) there was little reference to the private sector in the leaving care research apart from Lupton (1985 p.74-76). This demonstrated the limitations of small samples in specific geographical areas. Porter (1984) and Stein and Carey (1986) said that local authorities allocated tenancies to care leavers. Abrahams and Mungall (1989) demonstrated that this was not typical of most local authorities in the 1980s. The leaving care studies by Porter (1984) and Stein and Carey (1986) and Morgan-Klein (1985) were unable to characterise the diversity of the housing experience among care leavers and underestimated the extent of homelessness.

All leaving care studies and reports included fieldwork in the 1970s and early 1980s, before the visible rise in youth homelessness. The report by Morgan-Klein covered only the first few months after leaving care and it is possible that housing became a problem after a tenancy had failed.

The transition to employment and training

The second part in the transition to adulthood is the transition to employment. Although some young people enter full time employment on leaving school, the majority enter a transition which includes training and further education. Burgess (1980) argued that only those earning a full wage gained full adult status. Those who were unemployed, in training or education were dependent on their families, and the transition to adulthood was delayed. This did not apply to young people who were homeless and care leavers, the majority of whom were unemployed. They were independent of their families and had entered the transition to adulthood.

Burgess (1980) examined the relationship between leaving school, starting work and the transition to adulthood. He argued that the achievement of adult status was fulfilled with the receipt of an adult wage. Those young people who remained in further education or entered apprenticeship schemes experienced economic dependency. They did not achieve adult status until the training was completed and they were employed. Although receipt of a training allowance gave them some control over managing their income, it was not sufficient for full adult status. Burgess acknowledged that this was a stressful period for young people:

"The main source of trauma in this period may be associated with the process whereby aspirations are adjusted to the realities of the labour market...For many young people this phase will coincide with other major changes, leaving home, travel, complete financial independence of parents and of course marriage. In many cases the start of an adult wage will enable such changes to become financially possible. All these changes represent major breaks with the patterns of childhood and early youth and it is for this reason that the final transition to adulthood may be a time of major stress."

(Burgess, 1980 p. 51)

Burgess' argument applied to young people living at home, who remained dependent as they entered training and further education. With the rise in youth training programmes, for example the Youth Opportunities Programme, followed by Youth Training Schemes in 1986, more young people remained dependent on families because of the payment of low allowances. Finn (1986) found that 80% of trainees were only paid the minimum allowance. Youth Training Schemes were also criticised for providing narrow training for young women as clerks, typists, shop assistants and cleaners (Marsh, 1986).

Cockburn (1987) criticised Youth Training Schemes for reducing youth wages and substituting trainees for workers. Finn (1987) pointed out that young people were critical of Youth Training Schemes. They complained about low allowances, boring jobs and little training.

The argument that training schemes resulted in young people's dependency on their parents did not apply to homeless young people or care leavers. Pollit (1989) found that many homeless young people and care leavers possessed few qualifications and often had high support needs. Therefore, few were able to access training schemes. There was likely to be a close relationship between being unable to find accommodation and having no training placement.

"If you're homeless, what you spend all day doing is trying to find somewhere to sleep that night...It's impossible to stay on a YTS scheme."

(quoted in Hutson and Liddiard, 1990 p.179)

Homeless young people and care leavers were not dependent on their families and leaving home or care was not delayed by training. Therefore, the transition to adulthood was not delayed either.

Unemployment and the transition to adulthood

Although Burgess stressed the importance of starting work in the transition to adulthood, it is too simplistic to conclude that full adult status is equated with the receipt of a full adult wage.

He assumed that the majority of young people received an adult wage by the time they were 18 and 19. However, in 1988 only 1 in 5 young people found full time employment within a few months of leaving school (Family Policy Studies Centre, 1990). Few received an adult wage before they were in their mid-twenties. Burgess also did not foresee the rise in youth unemployment. Furthermore, his argument did not take account of the reality of leaving care or home and becoming homeless.

According to Burgess' theory, 80% of Stein and Carey's cohort would not have been seen as adults (Stein and Carey, 1986).

Hutson and Jenkins (1989) argued that:

"It is a distortion to suggest that long term unemployment can prevent young people from becoming adult, it does undoubtedly affect the quality of their lives as adults and their ability to achieve all of the dimensions of complete adulthood..."

(Hutson and Jenkins, 1989 p.107)

Unemployment could lead to homelessness. By 1987, 34% of 16 - 24 year olds were unemployed (Youthaid, 1990). As young people who had moved away from home failed to find work, they became homeless. Brandon et al (1980) argued that young people became homeless in London when, attracted to the city to look for work, they could find neither work nor a place to live. The first detailed report by Randall (1988), on behalf of Centrepont Soho, confirmed the link between coming to London to look for work and homelessness. The majority of young people arriving at Centrepont Soho's hostels came from areas outside London; 87% had been in London for less than one month; 92% were looking for a job.

Some found accommodation in hostels run by organisations such as Centrepont Soho. However, living in a hostel did not always increase employment prospects. In a survey of hostel residents Randall (1989, p.18) reported that 77% were unemployed on the day of the interview.

Those who were homeless and unemployed would have been excluded from adult status, according to Burgess (1980). Yet, they lived independently of their families and most had access to their own income.

Social security legislation and the transition to adulthood

By the late 1980s the definition of adulthood had to take account of young people's own, albeit limited, financial resources.

Whether in training or unemployed, young people had access to an independent income through the social security system. It meant that those who left home or care were responsible for managing their income.

"Claiming benefit is an adult transaction...It is something which young people have to do for themselves. The money, the giro cheque when it comes, is their money...they can, within limits, dispose of it as they see fit...It is a medium through which responsibility can be displayed: enough to scrape by on and enough to allow them to get into difficulties...It is an independent income for which they alone are responsible."

(Hutson and Jenkins, 1989 p.99)

However, during the 1980s, there were a number of social security changes which reduced young people's income. Commentators concluded that, in addition to a debilitating housing policy, the net effect of all social security changes was that young people were worse off. In many cases this increased their dependency on families even further (Wallace, 1987). However, Harris argued that, in a small number of cases, the stress caused by living on a low income could result in young people having to leave home and enter the transition to adulthood.

"The (Social Security) policy in relation to dependency is likely to be hampering the transition of some young people to adulthood because the attainment of independence, especially financial independence, is an important part of this transition. Enforced dependency by young people on their families has the potential to upset family relationships by causing poverty and stress,"

(Harris, 1988 p.520).

Furthermore, the reduction in social security payments undermined young people's ability to maintain their accommodation. Some could lose accommodation if they accumulated rent arrears. Others were likely to get into debt. Thus, social security policies which reduced young people's income were likely to hinder the transition to adulthood.

The Board and Lodgings Regulations 1985 represented the first change to the social security system which affected young people. The changes were introduced after reports that young people were staying in Bed and Breakfast establishments on the coast. Articles in the press claimed that they were having fun on the "Costa del Dole" at the taxpayers expense, rather than seeking work. The Act introduced a cash ceiling for board and lodgings and a time limit.

The Social Security Advisory Committee commented that those changes would lead to:

"a class of homeless and rootless young person who is unable to return to the parental home for whatever reason and who cannot remain long enough in any one location to find permanent accommodation or a job,"

(quoted in Thornton, 1990 p. 30)

Thornton (1990 p.39) found that local authorities reported that changes in the Board and Lodgings payments had led to young people being unable to afford accommodation and to B&B establishments closing down. She argued that the reduction in benefit and the potential closure of Bed and Breakfast hotels reduced housing options and could lead to prolonged homelessness.

The 1986 Social Security Act was aimed at transforming the social security system. Supplementary Benefit, with its many additional allowances, was replaced by Income Support. The Act aimed to target the most needy. It was to ease administrative systems, encourage self reliance and independence and reduce public expenditure. Income Support was paid at different age-related rates, with under 25 year olds receiving approximately 25% less in entitlement.

This was justified on the basis that most young people under 25 lived at home.

But, as the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Services commented:

"The case for age differential payments for Income Support in general is not convincing. An incremental rate makes some sense where young people are working and learning how to do a job.

It makes no sense when the payment is benefit for basic need."

(House of Commons Social Services Select Committee. Fourth Report, 1988-89, 9th November 1989)

Stein and Carey (1986) found a high level of benefit dependency among care leavers. Many had fallen into debt under Supplementary Benefit. It was likely that the reduced rate of Income Support for under 25 year olds would lead to further debts (Barnardos, 1989).

"These changes have placed an increased pressure on the young people - in some cases to such an extent that they have insufficient to live on after they had paid their rent...Barnardos believes that the work the young people have put into learning to be independent is undermined if they simply do not have enough money to live on when they leave care."

(Barnardos, 1989 p.4)

For those who lost their jobs, Income Support would be paid at only 60% if it could be claimed that the loss of employment because was the claimants fault. The reduced rate would apply for 26 weeks. Barnardos (1989) argued that care leavers without family support would find it difficult to manage on 60% of benefit. This would also apply to other young people living away from home without family support.

The 1986 Social Security Act also abolished single payments for essential items such as furniture and clothing. Single payments were replaced by the Social Fund. Under the Social Fund claimants could ask for a loan to purchase essential items. The loan was then recouped by deductions from their weekly benefit. Campaign groups, such as the

Central London Social Security Advisory Forum (CLASSAF, 1989b) demonstrated that the result of paying for essential items out of an already reduced benefit or taking out a loan, would be further reductions in income. CLASSAF (1989a) argued that this would result in young people having less money for food and bills.

Care leavers relied on community care grants to furnish and equip new accommodation. However, social fund officers claimed that leaving foster care was not like leaving institutional care. A National Audit Office survey (1991) found that 35 out of 39 DSS offices gave care leavers a medium to low priority for community care grants. This meant that, like other young people, care leavers had less money for day to day living expenses if a loan had to be repaid.

Under the Social Security Act 1986, Income Support was now paid in arrears. This meant that claimants had to live for 2 weeks without any money, unless they could claim a crisis loan. However, loans had to be repaid and young people were seen to be 'better able to cope with a crisis' than most, according to the Social Fund Manual.

The Social Security Act 1988 raised the qualifying age for Income Support from 16 to 18 years, on the basis that young people should remain at home until they could afford to live independently. Benefit payments should not encourage them to move away and they should be seeking work or training. A training place was guaranteed for every 16 and 17 year old.

"It is clearly not in the best interest of young people, their families or the nation as a whole that young people move straight into the benefit culture on leaving school...the social security system should not provide an incentive for the vast majority of them to leave the family home which is the best environment for them."

(Lord Reay, 21.11.90, Correspondence to Baroness Ewart-Biggs quoted by the Children's Society unpublished paper)

Child Care agencies and homelessness projects feared that the withdrawal of Income Support from 16 and 17 year olds would lead to increased destitution and homelessness (Barnardos, 1989).

Centrepont Soho (Randall, 1988) reported a 35% increase in the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds at their nightshelters in London in the 2 months after the Social Security Act was implemented in 1988. Thornton (1990 p.36) reported that 42% of local authorities had seen an increase in applications from under 18 years olds as homeless.

Pollit (1989) found that some hostels were unwilling to take people under 18 or would only accept those on Youth Training Schemes.

In 1989 the government introduced the Severe Hardship criteria, under which some 16 - 18 year olds could claim Income Support, if they provided proof that they were estranged from their parents and were actively seeking a Youth Training placement. In fact, the Severe Hardship criteria were only introduced after effective lobbying by pressure groups, who feared that thousands of 16 and 17 year olds would be left in crisis (Barnardos, 1989, Randall, 1988). Even after the criteria were introduced, practice varied among social security offices. Agencies claimed that many 16 -18 years olds were denied entitlement under the estrangement criteria (Pollit, 1989).

Care leavers, like 16 and 17 year olds estranged from their parents, could claim Income Support for up to 16 weeks after leaving school during the child benefit extension period. This was in recognition that they did not have family support. After this time they would have to take a Youth Training placement or find employment, because they would receive no more benefit. Without benefit, they would not be able to pay their rent. Eviction and homelessness were likely to follow. First Key, the Leaving Care Advisory Service, feared that more young people leaving care would become homeless after the changes were introduced (First Key Notes, 1988).

Changes to the Housing Benefit system in 1988 meant that benefit was now paid 2 weeks in arrears, and deposits and rent in advance were no longer funded. Given the fact that young people relied on the private sector to find bedsits, shared houses and flats, access was made much more difficult. It was likely that few would have the financial resources for a deposit and rent in advance. This could add up to several hundred pounds, even for a bedsit, as landlords were charging 4 weeks rent in advance plus 4 weeks rent as a deposit.

Crisis loans would only cover rent in advance in certain cases. CLASSAF (1989a) found that more often than not crisis loans were denied to homeless young people. Barnardos (1989) reported that, although young people could claim housing benefit for private sector rents, there was no guarantee that housing benefit would cover the asking rent. Furthermore, once they found employment, the steep housing benefit taper meant that accommodation could become beyond what they could afford. This could lead to young people having to move from one place to another.

In 1989 Board and Lodgings payments were further changed. Housing cost was met by housing benefit and any amount for services such as heat, light and food had to be met by Income Support. The Central London Social Security Advisor's Forum (CLASSAF, 1989a) found that Bed and Breakfast accommodation was no longer affordable and hostels were less likely to take young single people.

It was difficult to assess whether it was the benefit changes that had led to increased homelessness or whether it was a combination of factors, such as family conflict, the supply of accommodation and young people's personal characteristics.

Individual factors affecting the transition to adulthood and resulting in homelessness

In addition to social policies which affected the transition to adulthood and could lead to homelessness, individual factors could either support or undermine the process of living independently and managing an income successfully. Good financial and emotional support could enable young people to leave or return home. Once homeless, those who did not receive such help, could not return home. The lack of support prolonged their homelessness. Young people leaving care had little support from families or friends. They were also disadvantaged emotionally and lacking practical skills because of their experience of having been in care.

Support networks

Young people living at home received financial and material support when they were unemployed or when they wanted to leave home (Wallace, 1987). Wallace found that in some cases this enabled young people to leave home successfully.

"Jane: 'We got loans now and then and bits and pieces of bedding and all that. Things that, you know, when my mum's throwing something out we get our share.'"

(Jane quoted in Wallace, 1987 p.177)

Others received food, financial loans, gifts and household equipment (Hutson and Jenkins, 1989).

Apart from O'Mahony (1988), few authors commented on the lack of emotional and material support available to homeless young people from their families. They did not receive help with moving, furniture and paying for rent deposits or unexpected bills. They were less likely to receive advice on managing, for example, a tenancy. This would make it much harder for them to live independently successfully. If in difficulties, they could not return home, like students or those in training. If they had left home in crisis, they probably had not been prepared for independence (Cosgrave, 1988). Like homeless young people, care leavers had little support from their families (Stein and Carey, 1986) and faced many of the same difficulties.

Instead of family support, care leavers and homeless young people relied on professional help to secure housing or employment.

"It's gone from worst to brilliant because I've got a place and a job. I feel so secure now."

(Randall, 1989 p.28)

Those homeless young people who were housed in special schemes often had access to support workers. Although young people were critical of some of the rules in hostels, they also valued the support of projects if they had a particular problem. They stressed the need for well qualified staff (Drake et al 1981).

Studies provided less evidence about the emotional and material support given to young people by their peers. Reference was made to this in Beauchamp (1989). However, this was a small project which involved the author following the lives of 4 young people for a few weeks. On occasions young people spoke of the help given by others on the street, but they also had negative experiences, such as theft. It was difficult to generalise from this, as it was a unique account which did not claim to be representative.

Drake et al (1981) highlighted the number of young women staying with friends. Austerberry and Watson (1986) argued that these women were less likely to approach agencies and were therefore not included in many statistics. None of the studies examined how young women experienced staying with friends, how they left and why they became homeless. Thus, although it is possible to conclude that friendship networks were important in providing temporary accommodation, little was known about the quality and impact of this on young women.

The vulnerability of care leavers to homelessness

Existing literature did not provide a detailed analysis as to why care leavers were over represented among homeless young people. O'Mahony (1988) concentrated on the impact of housing policy.

"lack of access to suitable housing is the single greatest obstacle to a young person leaving care overcoming the disadvantages of the child care system."

(O'Mahony, 1988 p.12)

In addition to the failure of central and local government policies which contributed to homelessness, the author argued that care leavers received poor preparation for leaving care and that they were not helped to gain the necessary independent living skills.

"Residential care has usually given them few coping skills...independence - type programmes, that part of the leaving care process that has its aim to prepare the individual to cope with the future, come in for heavy criticism...too many of these programmes are started too late, offer too little, impose pressures that contribute to failure and are geared only to those who are likely to succeed."

(O'Mahony, 1988 p.11)

This lack of preparation for leaving care was supported by NAYPIC (1983), who found that care leavers were not given adequate practical skills, such as budgeting.

"The notion 'sink or swim' that young people have to accept and which social workers use to measure their involvement is appalling....Lack of support can mean that young people get led to a life of destitution..."

(NAYPIC, 1983 p.34)

In addition to the poor preparation for leaving care and absence of housing options, the lack of professional after care support was also raised as a problem. Although some young people approached social services when they had a problem, not all received a service (NAYPIC, 1983). This view was supported by evidence from Centrepont Soho (Randall, 1989) who found that very few care leavers had been found accommodation by local authorities when they left care and that they did not receive adequate information about their options. Furthermore, in some areas it was social workers who made referrals to homelessness projects or sent young people to the nearest town with homelessness provision or even to London (O'Mahony, 1988).

Abrahams and Mungall (1989) argued that care leavers were particularly vulnerable to homelessness because of their personal experience. The experience of being in care, together with poor educational qualifications, low self esteem and continual movement disadvantaged them more than other young people.

"It would appear that being in care often serves to reinforce the disadvantaged nature of a young person's background...with disrupted schooling, low expectations and low self esteem."

(Abrahams and Mungall 1989p.10)

O'Mahony (1988) added that movement in care was mirrored by the emotional and physical upheaval of living in temporary accommodation. He thought that within homeless projects care leavers were the most disorganised group of young people, with the least independent living skills and that they posed difficulties for workers.

Because there were no studies of the experience of homelessness by care leavers, the literature was unable reach conclusions as to the role of the care system and the individual characteristics which led to homelessness.

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Transition to Forming a Partnership and becoming a parent

Social policies in housing, employment and social security increased young people's dependency on their families. For the majority, living independently and financial independence was delayed. Care leavers and homeless young people made transitions to independent housing and managing financially, but their success was undermined by the lack of family support. Unemployment could also delay the third transition of marriage and becoming a parent. However, there was some evidence that this did not apply to care leavers.

Laslett (1983) and Leonard (1980) argued that adult status was associated with marriage, rather than leaving home or employment. By the late 1980s, the prevalence of cohabitation rather than marriage undermined this argument.

Wallace (1987) found that at least one member of a cohabiting couple was employed. Unemployment delayed marriage and, in most cases, cohabitation. But in the case of case of care leavers unemployment did not delay cohabitation.

Stein and Carey (1986 p.83) found that two and a half years after leaving care 50% of women were living with a partner, although both partners were unemployed. It is possible that female care leavers, in particular, moved in with partners if there was no other accommodation available. This link was not further explored in the literature.

Becoming a parent is part of the transition to adulthood, although few authors referred to this transition. Wallace (1987) found that in some cases motherhood gave a new status to those long term unemployed.

"Motherhood seemed to offer more status than either a low status job or unemployment...It would appear that marriage, motherhood, and domesticity often 'caught up' with girls...rather than being an actively espoused status."

(Wallace, 1987 p.165)

Stein and Carey (1986) found that a third of young women had become parents during the first 24 months of leaving care. Many were unemployed or working in low status jobs. Thus, the same link could be made between unemployment, low status jobs and motherhood as was made by Wallace (1987). Like Wallace, Stein and Carey found that the majority of pregnancies were not planned.

It would seem that the leaving care literature confirmed some of the findings of other research in making a link between adulthood, cohabitation and becoming a parent. However, it is difficult to generalise from these studies, as in both the respective samples were less than 20.

To conclude, the evidence of the literature argued that children who came into care had already experienced difficulties within their families. There was evidence of childhood abuse and neglect, family conflict, domestic violence and poverty. Those who experienced abuse and neglect often came into care as young children. The care system was to provide care and stability. Those who came into care because of family conflict and challenging behaviour were said to be in need of control.

For both groups, stability in adolescence would have been important.

The evidence of the literature demonstrated that being in care often further compounded young people's problems. The majority moved frequently between different foster and residential placements. They felt the stigma of the care system. Their self esteem was low and further undermined by poor school performance. Their inter personal relationships with social workers, parents and friends were poor. These experiences were likely to influence the way they left care and made the transition to adulthood. A minority of young people in long term foster care remained there after leaving care. A further small number returned to live with their parents. However, the majority left care between 16 and 18 years of age. At this age most other young people were still living at home.

If they started work, education or training they had the support of their parents. If they left home they often had considerable help. Those with an unstable experience of care, often left unplanned and in crisis. If permanent housing was not provided, they had to rely on temporary housing. Government policy on housing, employment, training and social security was based on the belief that young people should remain in the parental home until they could afford to live independently. Those care leavers and other young people who could not rely on families to support them were vulnerable to homelessness, unemployment and debts. Care leavers were over represented among homeless young people because their difficult childhood and adolescence made them particularly vulnerable. By the late 1980s, it was not known how many care leavers became homeless. Furthermore, once homeless, what would be the impact on their self esteem, employment prospects, physical and mental health? Finally, how did care leavers find permanent housing or avoid homelessness and poverty?

Chapter 2: Methodology Part 1

This chapter details the research design and the research themes for the first part of the PhD.

Research themes

Following the literature review, I wanted to throw light on the factors contributing to homelessness among young women, in particular the role of the care experience. I also wanted to investigate why young women leaving care were over represented among homeless young people. There would be immediate policy spin-offs. If the factors leading to homelessness could be identified then social workers would be able to take account of those in the preparation for leaving care and after care support. Specialist accommodation schemes could be made aware of the needs of care leavers. Housing support could be better structured to meet the support needs of young women leaving care. Examining the impact of social policies on homeless young people would inform policy makers and contribute to the debate on how to assist young people to find permanent housing. In examining how young women avoided homelessness and how they found permanent accommodation, our understanding of what kind of support (policy, emotional or practical) would be useful would increase.

Research approach

Given the limited knowledge in this field, this would be an exploratory, qualitative study, investigating the range of factors impacting on a sample of young women. This approach was supported by Burgess (1984).

"The focus is upon the way in which participants interpret their experience and construct reality...The ultimate aim is to study situations from the participants point of view...Using this theoretical perspective it therefore becomes essential to gather statements made by participants with a view to examining the various dimensions of the situations they construct," (Burgess, 1984 p.3-4).

A qualitative approach would also enable me to understand what was important to young women and would explore relevant themes and issues with them through discussion ((Rose, 1982, Lofland and Lofland, 1971).

One focus was on how young women managed change and the transition to adulthood, building on the work of Willis (1977) and Hutson and Jenkins (1989). Willis (1977) in 'Learning to Labour' examined the process of leaving school and finding work for a group of young men. Hutson and Jenkins (1989) demonstrated the impact of unemployment on the transition to adulthood and families by interviewing young people aged 18 to 25 and their families. Hutson and Jenkins in particular examined how young people handled a potentially difficult transition to adulthood.

I then considered sampling options. I could have collected a random sample of young women who had left care by contacting social services departments and voluntary organisations. However, though workers and organisations were likely to be in contact with homeless young women, they were less likely to be in contact with young women who were living in settled and secure accommodation. Although I would have been able to answer questions about why young women became homeless, I might not have been able to find out, how some young women managed to maintain housing. I was also concerned whether I would be able to identify a sufficient sample of young women. I would only have been in contact with young women working with professionals. Finally, I would have had to ask young women about their experiences retrospectively relying on their longer term memory rather than being able to follow them over a period of time.

I also considered the possibility of following a cohort of young women who had already left care in one year and were over the age of 18. This would have enabled me to look at a group who were the same age and had the experience of the same local authority area. However, existing research suggested that the majority of young people leave care before the age of 18. It was likely that I would have missed their first move into independence.

Secondly, my own experience as a social worker (later confirmed by Garnett 1992) highlighted that some social workers do not keep in contact with young people, once they have moved into independence, and would not know of a current address. Therefore, I would have lost a proportion of the cohort before I began my research.

Ideally, I would have needed to follow a cohort of young people from at least reception into care until 18 months after they left care. This would have enabled me to ask questions about their recent family experience, to chart the time they were in care and to monitor the process of leaving care and transition into adulthood. Clearly such a time consuming process was beyond the scope of this PhD.

I, therefore, first decided that I would limit the sample to those who had been in care continuously since before their 16th birthday or for at least 12 months before the first interview. 'In care' included residential and foster care and 'home on trial' as all of those forms of care were likely to have been experienced by the young women and all involved considerable contact with the care system (Stein and Carey, 1986).

I kept the longitudinal design, as used in Stein and Carey's study (1986), who had followed a cohort of 45 young people leaving care over a period of two and a half years. I planned to have 4 interviews starting at the age of 17 or 17 and 3 months. The first interview was to take place whilst the young women were still in care and social services had a current address. This interview would look at the family and care experience to build a systematic picture of the sample. I decided on the age of 17 or 17 and 3 months because Stein and Carey (1986) had found that the majority of young people had moved into independence before the age of 18. Once young people had moved, social services was less likely to have a current record of their address. If I held interviews much later than 17, there was a danger that I would not be able to contact young women.

Stein and Carey (1986) conducted interviews every 9 months. The fieldwork took 2 and a half years to complete. The authors lost contact with 21 young people. I decided that I would plan interviews at 6 monthly intervals, to reduce the drop out rate and save time on the fieldwork, given the time constraints of the PhD. I wanted to cover as long a period as possible after the young women moved into independence, to assess the level of

homelessness and discover whether the young women found and maintained housing, employment and child care. I, therefore, decided on 3 further interviews. The second and third interview would look in detail at the events of the previous 6 months and discover what strategies the young women used to deal with difficult situations. They were only 6 months apart to avoid a high drop out rate. The fourth and final interview would be held when the young women were between the age of 18 and 6 or 9 months. Even, if some young women did not move into independence until the care order expired or voluntary care ended at 18, the duty to provide statutory care, and therefore financial support, would have ended at least 6 to 9 months previously and young women were likely to have entered the transition to adulthood. The final interview would also look back at the events of leaving care and moving into independence.

Stein and Carey (1986) had conducted their research in one local authority area. They had established a 2 year cohort of 79 young people, of whom 45 participated in the fieldwork. By the final interview the researchers had lost contact with nearly half the original cohort, although, in some cases, interviews with foster carers and social workers enabled them to collect some data on these young people. For this study, it would be important to establish a manageable group of participants, suitable for the scale of a PhD. Based on the experience of Stein and Carey I was hoping for a total cohort of 50 young women. This would probably mean a cohort from more than one local authority because I wanted to interview young women at the age of 17 rather than between 16 and 18. Of the total of 50, I was hoping approximately 30 would participate. I believed that this would be manageable within the time constraints of the PhD.

I approached 2 local authorities. One was Warwickshire County Council Social Services Department because I was already living in Warwickshire and working with care leavers for the local social services department. I was confident that colleagues would support the research and the travel involved would be limited. The other was Coventry Social Services Department. I worked closely with homelessness organisations in Coventry and knew the leaving care project in Coventry. Furthermore, travel would be limited.

I decided that I would make contact with the sample by writing to their social worker first. I anticipated that each social worker would wish to know about the research, particularly as it covered the personal experience of each young woman. I also thought that young women might be more likely to respond if their social worker could discuss the research first or prepare them for my approach. I also considered that senior managers might request an approach through social workers as a condition of permission for the research.

It would be important to establish a relationship with each young woman. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) and Lofland and Lofland (1971) emphasised the importance of meaningful relationships between the researcher and the participant in order to understand the participant's experience, behaviour or interaction. Oakley (1981) also stressed the importance of trust. Building trust would be important in addressing potentially sensitive areas with the young women.

I decided on face to face interviews with young women themselves. Oakley (1981) argued that this could potentially give research participants more control over the research process. However, she also pointed out that the class, culture and reason for study could leave the control in the hands of the researcher. This was also true of my research as I developed pre-planned topics and controlled the research for the purpose of a doctoral thesis. The research design, analysis and final presentation, apart from requiring specialist skills, would be influenced by the requirements of the university rather than the research participants.

I designed the detailed interview schedule in the autumn of 1990 and I undertook a small pilot study between August and September 1990.

Research schedule and pilot

The first interview schedule was piloted with 5 young women. Although interviews with workers and or foster carers would have given me a more complete picture I decided that I did not have the necessary resources to complete this. Furthermore, I felt that I would get more honest and detailed information from them if they knew that I was not in contact with carers or professionals but completely independent.

The 5 young women involved in the pilot had left care between 1 and 3 years previously. They were identified through my contact with social work colleagues, foster carers and the National Association of Young People in Care. I could have interviewed young women currently in care whom I knew. However, they were likely to be part of a future sample and I did not want to reduce the potential cohort. The pilot demonstrated that the young women could talk in detail of their experience of care. Most went into care as young children and had less knowledge of their families and early relationships with parents. 3 out of 5 had become homeless after leaving care: there had been little family support. They felt that social services had done little to prepare them and, apart from foster carers, there had been no after care support. Most of them had moved into independence before the age of 18 and had little contact with social workers. This confirmed the need to contact a cohort before the care order expired. The pilot also confirmed housing, support networks and the impact of having been in care as important issues for them.

The final interview schedule for the first interview was defined and structured taking into account the pilot interviews and the research questions (see Appendix B). The questions aimed to guide the conversation and the order could be adjusted.

I was aware from my work experience that homelessness, employment, families and children could place extreme pressure on young women. I felt that it would be more honest to offer advice and assistance if asked to do so and I was in a position to help. Potentially, this could raise expectations that I would be able to solve problems, (Maguire, 1987). However, I was clear that I would only intervene if I felt able to do so.

The first interview schedule covered family history, reception into care, the time young women spent in care and their expectations and plans for leaving care and moving into independence. I decided on the order of those topics after the pilot as I had found that it seemed less threatening than recent events. This interview was planned to take place at the age of 17 or 17 and 3 months. If young women had already moved into independence I asked briefly how and where they had moved to, and how they managed income, support and child care if they had any children.

The second schedule started with their recent accommodation history and then covered employment, money management and child care. This was followed by a section about the nature of the support they were given by others and family relationships. I also asked what they had found most enjoyable and difficult over the previous 6 months to get an understanding of their priorities and main concerns. The schedule was flexible enough to cover the issue of leaving care and their expectations as and when it occurred.

These topics were repeated in the third and fourth schedule. After the first interview I developed my ideas about the importance of the transition to adulthood further and questions on this topic were included in the second, third and fourth interview. I also wanted to know whether the definition of home used in the research was recognised by the young women. I added a question and a rating of their present accommodation based on what I considered the key aspects of home based on the literature. Again, those were completed in the second, third and fourth interview. I also asked young women to complete 2 questionnaires on semantic differential which tried to assess their personal skills and abilities in terms of maintaining relationships, decision making skills and taking responsibility. These were completed at each interview. A chart listing relationships was also completed which enabled me to draw out changes in the support network of the group. The final interview schedule included an added section about their views of being in care and leaving care to assess whether the experience of leaving care had influenced either or both.

The question was whether it would be possible to gather a sample with such characteristics, given the difficulty in identifying and keeping up contact with an adequate sample size. I left it open at this early stage whether, following an initial qualitative exploration, a more quantitative follow up to test derived hypotheses would be possible within the scope of the PhD

Gathering the sample

I approached Warwickshire and Coventry Social Services Departments in October and November 1990. Both agreed to participate in the longitudinal study. By the end of November the policy and research sections had established a list of young women who had been in care for at least 12 months, born between September 1973 and December 1974,

as I planned to start interviews in January 1991 when these women would be between 17 and 17 and 3 months. The total number was of 44, (Coventry 23 and Warwickshire 21). This was a lower number than the 50 I had planned for. However, at the time I decided to establish the total number of participants in the research before considering any options to widen the sample, either by age or by approaching another local authority. The young women were either on a care order or in voluntary care.

I decided to exclude the following young women:

- young women placed on a remand to care as they were placed for very short periods and without their choice or the choice of social services;
- young women whose period in care was less than 12 months as those would have different experiences of short term care than those who had been in care for a number of years;
- young women leaving care who were placed outside the area and who remained there, because I would be unable to travel to them easily;
- young women with severe learning difficulties as the research schedule did not address their needs and I felt that their experience was likely to be so different as not comparable to the remainder of the sample.

Coventry and Warwickshire had stipulated that the young women should be contacted via their social workers. From December 1990 each social worker was contacted initially by letter. I gave the name of the young woman and brief details about the aims of the study (Appendix B). I, then, contacted each worker by phone to discuss the project and establish a way of contacting the young woman 6 to 8 weeks before the young women's 17th birthday or as soon as possible thereafter. I also informed local voluntary organisations working with young people leaving care as well as voluntary housing providers who might be in contact with young people throughout the research. The response from most workers was positive.

Depending on the young woman's circumstances I either proposed the interview at the age of 17, or if she was living in foster care and did not plan to move, I delayed the interview for 3 months. This decision was made because I wanted to cover as long a period as possible after the young women's 18th birthday. However, this meant that it took me 11 months to gather the total sample. Furthermore, it took considerable time to contact social workers as they often responded to only the second or third phone call. The response was better if I either knew the young woman through my work or the social worker. By December 1991 a total of 24 young women had agreed to take part and completed the first interview. All 9 young women who I knew personally agreed to participate because I had been working with them individually or in a care group and had established a good relationship. 7 young women had learning difficulties and were excluded. 2 social workers were unwilling for the young women to be contacted. In one case the foster carers had just been granted custodianship and in the other one, the young woman had been adopted. 11 young women refused to take part. They either did not respond to the first letter and a follow up letter or their social workers told me that the young woman had declined to participate.

The process of contacting social workers and the young women had taken longer than anticipated. I had also hoped for a lower drop out rate. I decided to include 4 young women who had been in care for less than 12 months. One young woman had been in care from the age of 13 until 16 when she moved into independence. By 16 and a half she had been remanded to care and by her 17th birthday was just moving to her own flat. She had substantial experience of the care system and was, therefore, included. A second young woman was with foster carers for 4 months before moving to a hostel. However, her family had been in contact with social services for a number of years and I also included her. The third young woman had been in care for 11 months and also had substantial contact with social services over a number of years and was included. The fourth woman had been with foster carers for 9 years as part of a shared care arrangement. She returned home at the age of 16 but then asked to go into Supported Lodgings where she stayed for 6 months before returning home again.

As the sample was smaller than anticipated I considered widening the cohort to a third local authority because I feared that out of a total of 24 the drop out could be significant. Looking back it might have been easier to widen the age group and include an additional cohort of young women aged 17 and a half to 18 in the 2 existing local authorities. However, I did not consider this at the time.

I started the process of finding a third local authority by the end of March 1991 when I had had a number of refusals and knew of 9 young women, who either had learning difficulties or social workers did not want me to contact them. I first of all approached Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire Social Services Departments because they were within a one hour travel limit. In April 1991, I also contacted Solihull Borough Council, who made approval by the Association of Directors of Social Services a condition of acceptance. In May and June 1991, both Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire declined to participate. I still had no response from the Association of Directors of Social Services. In August 1991, I decided to contact Wolverhampton Borough Council because one of the team managers was a friend of mine and supportive of the research. Wolverhampton Borough Council agreed to take part in October 1991. By this time the Association of Directors of Social Services had also given their support to the research. I decided to pursue Wolverhampton rather than Solihull because I had already started the process of making contact. However, Wolverhampton was a 2 hour drive from my home. Furthermore, I was not familiar with the local authority. After initial contact with 5 social workers, only one young woman responded. She then cancelled the initial interview. By this time I had already completed the first 2 interviews in the 2 selected local authority areas. The drop out had been minimal (2). I was confident that I would maintain contact with the majority of the original sample from Warwickshire and Coventry. I decided not to pursue the third local authority because the additional group would have been small. The planned fieldwork already spanned a period of 2 1/2 years and would have taken a further 12 months to complete.

Geographical Area

Coventry is an industrial city in the Midlands whose industry declined sharply in the 1970s and 1980s with the reduction in manufacturing industrial output. Coventry had been hit hard by unemployment and young people experienced high levels of unemployment in the city.

There is a north - south divide within the city as people with higher incomes and owner occupation and more prosperous houses are predominantly based in the south of the city. The north of the city with Hillfields and Foleshill is mainly working class with large council estates in Bell Green and Wood End which were also characterised by poor housing quality. In addition, Coventry has a large population from the Indian Sub-continent based in the north of the city, mainly Hillfields and Foleshill.

Young people in care were placed in residential and foster care whilst Coventry 16+ was a relatively new project run by the Children's Society supporting young people leaving care. Coventry Young Homeless Project provided some accommodation for young homeless people in hostels and shared houses. Emergency accommodation was also provided by the YMCA and the Cyrenians as well as large local authority hostels. Given the existence of hostels, B&B's and special projects, Coventry had a housing problem and the Cyrenians stated that 30% of their users were young people under the age of 25. As there was no obligation by the Department of the Environment on local authorities to keep statistics of non priority need homeless people, the local authority statistics by definition excluded the majority of young people who were single and with non dependants.

Coventry City Council operated a system by which young people leaving care were considered for council tenancies under the age of 18 if they were referred by their social worker. Those tenancies were granted in predominantly 'hard to let' areas. In the private sector young people leaving care competed with students from the local university and the polytechnic.

Warwickshire is a large semi-rural rural area with the larger towns of Rugby, Leamington, Nuneaton and Stratford as well as smaller towns and villages. Warwickshire has access to a good motorway system with connections to the north and south of the country.

Therefore, industry increasingly settles in this area. The cost of land and housing has risen sharply as the area serves as a commuter area for Birmingham and London. There are council estates in the larger towns, some of which were in poor condition and were planned to be refurbished. The larger towns also had a number of high rise buildings. Homeless families were likely to be housed there despite the fact that these buildings were rejected by local people as appropriate housing.

The Social Services Department placed all children and young people in care in foster homes in the local area unless a young person was felt to benefit from a residential placement outside the area or residential education. There were no agreements with the local housing departments to give priority for housing to young people leaving care. Long housing waiting lists were based on a point system and almost inaccessible for single care leavers without dependent children.

There were a number of local small voluntary organisations providing short term accommodation for homeless people but this was felt to be of varying quality by young people. In some parts of the county the private sector provided some housing but there was competition with workers and students. Rents for good quality accommodation were high and care leavers were more likely to be forced into sub standard bedsit accommodation. Again, there were no statistics available at the start of this PhD which looked at the housing and homelessness experience of young people. Local authority statistics were based on those in priority need, namely persons with dependants, pregnant women or those with special needs. Local projects had anecdotal evidence of young people seeking housing. Many were referred to Coventry due to the lack of emergency and supported housing for young people in the county.

Definitions and terminology

I defined homelessness as living without accommodation which complied with health and safety standards, which ensured the physical safety of the individual, was secure in tenure, gave the individual control over how to live and ensured a social space in which to meet friends.

Home and homelessness represent a continuum. I defined home as beginning with home ownership, followed by a secure tenancy, living with parents or in formally agreed lodgings. This was followed by different forms of temporary arrangement, a long term hostel or specialist accommodation scheme, short stay hostels with a licence, staying with a partner, family or relative unplanned. On a friend's floor, Bed and Breakfast hotels and night shelters were defined as emergency accommodation. Sleeping rough was at the end of the spectrum of home and homelessness.

Taking into account the above definition of homelessness, all temporary and emergency accommodation was defined as homelessness. This continuum was not without its difficulties. Staying with a family member or relative might not have been a choice but a necessity for young people with nowhere to go. If there was tension than it might not have met the criteria of 'home'. Therefore, young people could have been homeless at home. Although I listed short stay hostels as temporary accommodation, they gave protection through a licence which staying at home, with relatives or friends did not give. Young people could have felt secure in staying with a partner and not regarded themselves as homeless although the relationship could have broken down at any time leaving them with nowhere to go. I defined living with a partner as a temporary arrangement unless it was a joint tenancy because young women had otherwise no security of tenure.

The legal definition of leaving care is the date on which the care order expires or voluntary care ends. However, such a definition equated leaving care with a date rather than a process. For this research leaving care was defined as moving into independence. This meant the move from accommodation which was financed and registered with social services departments such as foster care, residential placements and supported lodgings. Independence placements were those not directly financed by social services departments even if a referral was made to for example, a hostel or a stay with friends or relatives was organised by social workers but not financially supported.

The Children Act 1989 was implemented during the duration of the PhD. It introduced new terms. Being in care changed to 'being looked after', access to 'contact', reception into care to 'admission to care' and 'accommodated' rather than 'voluntary care'. The fieldwork had already begun when those changes were introduced. As most young people used the words 'being in care' I decided to stick with this phrase in the interview schedule. Therefore, the literature review, methodology, all quotes by the young women and the analysis use the old phrase.

Interview process

Interview	Number of young women
1	24
2	22
3	21
4	20*

*2 of the last 20 interviews were only partly completed by phone.

I was able to complete all 24 interviews on the first visit to the young woman. The interview took place in their foster home, their own tenancy, hostels and the parental home. 2 young women asked to meet me at my office because they felt more comfortable there. I tried to meet each young woman in private but this was not always possible. On 2 occasions partners were present. Although this could have been difficult when discussion the relationship between the couple the young women were able to answer all questions fully. One partner seemed concerned about the Dictaphone I was using to record the interview. I reassured both that I would not be reporting to the Social Services Department but I felt that he was not convinced. In one other case a grandmother sat in on the interview. She was concerned that I had understood the complaints of her granddaughter about being in care. However, she was less happy for her granddaughter to explain the circumstances under which she came into care.

The first interview schedule had worked well in getting young women to talk about themselves. There were some occasions where a particular incident took over the initial interview and altered the order of the interview schedule. For example, one young woman had had a still birth shortly before the second interview. She started our conversation with this news and we spend considerable time talking about the impact of those recent events. I agreed that I would sent typed transcripts of each interview to the young women.

The second interview took place after 6 months. A number of women had moved. I had agreed that I would contact me if they moved but none in fact did so. I initially contacted the young women at their last address. If this proved unsuccessful I contacted their social worker. Twice I went to flats which had been vacated. The local Careers Service was helpful in knowing where some young women had moved to. Another woman contacted me at the office to say she had moved. Others did not keep the appointment I had made but I was able to re-arrange most. After several attempts I completed 22 interviews. One young woman did not respond to my letter. She lived in lodgings and I called several times for her. However, the social services department had recently investigated her foster father for indecent exposure and she was aware that I worked for the department. It is possible that she, therefore, did not want to meet me. The second young woman had vacated her flat and I met her by chance. We arranged to meet but when I came her partner did not want her to talk to me.

Nearly all 22 second interviews were completed successfully. Most of the young women seemed pleased to see me, possibly surprised that somebody was interested in them. More of them wanted to speak to me in private. Carers and partners were now more likely to be send out of the room or house. One interview took place in my car because the grandmother did not want the interview to take place in the house. Apparently she and the young woman were upset about the content of the transcript which referred to her family experience. I spent a couple of hours after the interview with the young woman and her grandmother. The grandmother, in her seventies, felt the pressure of looking after a young woman who was nearly 18 years old. There had been no contact from the social services department after their re-organisation. I agreed to contact the allocated social worker and explained the content of the transcript. I agreed not to quote certain parts of the interview in the thesis.

This interview made me wonder whether to send transcripts in future because there was no possibility of visiting young women after the interview to discuss the transcript. I decided to discuss the content with each young woman and only send copies if they were requested. None of the others were particularly concerned about the transcripts but they did not feel it necessary to receive a copy. Furthermore, as so many were likely to move I decided not to send such confidential information by post.

21 young women completed the third interview. I had lost contact with one young woman who had moved to Wales to live near her mother. Her former foster carers did not have a new address for her and I was unable to complete a telephone interview. Again, a number of others had moved but I was able to trace most of them. By now I had asked them for a contact of a friend or family member who would know their new address. This proved a more reliable way of contacting those who had moved than social workers.

The final interview was completed by 20 young women. 2 of those had moved several times and I was only able to contact them by telephone. I was able to gather general data on where and how they had moved to and when but not any detailed information on all areas of the interview schedule. Contact with one young woman was lost who was thought to have moved to Birmingham. Her social worker did not know where she was and her family did not respond to any letters. The relationship with her mother had at times been difficult and I decided not to pursue this any further.

I was asked for advice on dealing with social services several times throughout the second, third and fourth interview. Maguire (1987) had raised the difficulties of raising participant's expectations which could not be met. I had decided that I would respond to such requests and this was much appreciated by the young women. A different decision could have strained the relationship. The young women might have felt abandoned and used if I had refused intervention on the grounds of impartiality. Oakley (1981) had emphasised the importance of women interviewing women as women researchers were in a better position to work with other women in interviews due to their common experiences.

There were a number of disclosures of sexual abuse which were painful for the young women to talk about. On those occasions being a social worker and a women interviewer might have enabled the young women to talk about such sensitive issues. It is also possible that the women felt able to speak to somebody who was not close to them and who they would only rarely see. Due to my work with abuse victims I was also able to respond appropriately to their feelings of anger, confusion and guilt. In one case I had to abandon the interview and deal with the pain of the young woman. The interview was later completed. 2 other young women asked me to contact social services to negotiate financial and after care support. This was possible due to my close links with senior managers in the department and was responded to sensitively by the relevant teams. I was aware that it would be difficult to raise the young women's expectations of what my intervention could achieve. I explained to each of them that I would contact with managers but the final decision would be the social services' responsibility. I also advised them of the complaints procedures they could use themselves. Finally, 2 women were referred for counselling following financial problems and the disclosure of sexual abuse.

I was not able to cross-check the information given by the young women, though I did not feel that I was lied to during any of the interviews. My only check was when I knew the young woman through my work as a social worker and was in a position to know some of the background myself.

It was difficult to find an end to my involvement with the remaining 20 young women. In some cases relationships had become friendly because I knew so much about their lives. I was worried that I had raised expectations of future friendships a point also made by Maguire, (1987). I knew I would not be able to sustain those with the majority, nor was it appropriate to remain closely involved. I also worried that at least one young woman regarded me as a substitute social worker. I dealt with those situations by referring her to a counselling service. Nonetheless, there is a danger that she felt deserted. Others invited me to visit them, go for a drink or meal. I did so on a couple of occasions. Both young women were independent and did not regard me as a social worker but more of an adult friend. One of them has become a social worker and I regularly provide references for work.

In those cases where I felt that I would have to provide a support role I decided to end contact in order to prevent dependency.

I would have liked to establish a process whereby I could have rewarded them for their contribution and fed back the results of the analysis. Unfortunately, the final results of the PhD were ready some 3 to 4 years after the end of the fieldwork. By this time I did not have a current address for most of the young women. I decided that it would not be practical to re-establish contact to pass on the results of the research.

Data analysis

By the end of the 4 interviews I had 87 completed and partly completed transcripts. I read each interview transcript several times and highlighted common themes. Given the limited sample I decided to analyse the material manually. There were 2 copies of each interview transcript. One copy was kept in a personal file for each young woman. This provided a chronological account of the 18 months of the fieldwork period. A second copy was then separated into different headings derived from the common themes. Each piece of data was allocated to thematic files. Each individual file held all the relevant information from the cohort on one theme as well as descriptions of the young women, living environment and any other impressions I formed, (Lofland and Lofland, 1971).

I also wanted to compare the results of this study with new literature published in the 1990s. In analysing the data I was aware of coding certain data in such a way that a comparison would be meaningful. I started with the analysis of factual material, for example the age at admission to care, number of care placements and the number of disruptions. I analysed each factor separately before looking at cross-tabulations. The chi square factor in each cross tabulation was calculated. If there was a significant relationship, then this is referred to in the text. I then examined each thematic file and coded common themes and patterns among the cohort. Each point was illustrated using quotes which were representative of the group.

This study included only 4 young women of Asian (1) and mixed heritage (3). The experience of these young women might have been distinctive from the remaining cohort, (First Key, 1987). The different experience of this group is highlighted where possible within the analysis. It was not possible to present their experience separately as it was a small and diverse group. Furthermore, sometimes their experience was more akin to a particular pattern among the cohort as a whole than with each other.

The semantic differential chart had not been piloted. In hindsight a standard psychological test might have been more appropriate. I, therefore, decided not to use this data as I did not believe it to be reliable.

The questions examining the women's experience of their family were posed retrospectively and at the time I did not anticipate making a rigorous link between their experience of family relationships and managing the transition to adulthood. Therefore, there were gaps in the information I collected regarding the impact of abuse and conflict on themselves, their relationship with parent/s and their subsequent reaction to those experiences within the family.

The following section of the analysis outlines each theme separately. It charts the experience of the cohort over the 18 months of the longitudinal study. The evidence of all 4 interviews is usually presented together. All the young women's names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the young women and the number after the quote indicates which interview the quote was taken from. A detailed history of each young woman is given in Appendix C to inform the reader.

The approach is to report the results around themes and issues based on the whole group. At this stage I decided not to develop individual case studies from the data. This was done later, and the results reported in chapter 5.

Name	1st Interview Age	Accommodation	Employment status	2nd Interview Age	Accommodation	Employment status
Holly	17 5 months	Hostel	Youth Training	17 10 months	Hostel	Unemployed
Jean	17	Parental home	Student	17 7 months	Parental Home	Student
Kate	17 3 months	Foster care	Unemployed	17 10 months	Foster care	Baby 12 weeks
Ruby	17 2 months	Grandmother's	Unemployed	17 8 months	Grandmother's	Unemployed
Alice	17 3 months	Boyfriend's	Unemployed	17 9 months	Private rented flat	Youth Training
Sally	17 2 months	Council flat	Unemployed	17 8 months	Council flat	Baby still born
Kim	17 5 months	Hostel	Youth Training	18 2 months	Hostel	Unemployed
Kelly	17 3 months	Foster care	Student	17 10 months	Foster care	Baby 9 weeks
Jaz	17 4 months	Supported Lodgings (SSD)	Youth Training	17 11 months	Council flat	Youth Training
Tanja	17	Council flat	Baby and pregnant	No further	interviews	completed
Jo	17 1 months	Supported Lodgings (SSD)	Unemployed	17 7 months	Private rented flat	Unemployed
Hannah	17 4 months	Hostel	Unemployed	17 10 months	Parental home	Unemployed
Amy	17	Council flat	Unemployed	17 8 months	Friend's	Unemployed
Nancy	17 2 months	Foster care	Student	17 8 months	Foster care	Student
Charlie	17 4 months	Lodgings	Employed	17 11 months	Lodgings	Employed
Ann	17	Foster care	Youth Training	17 6 months	Foster care	Youth Training
Lisa	17 3 months	Lodgings	Working	No further	interviews	completed
Viv	17	Hostel	Unemployed	17 7 months	Lodgings	Unemployed
Pat	17	Foster care	Baby 11 months	17 7 months	Foster care	2nd baby born
Diane	17 3 months	Foster care	Student	17 9 months	Foster care	Student
Linda	17 2 months	Foster care	Unemployed	17 10 months	Boyfriend's	Baby 18 weeks
Mary	17 2 months	Foster care	Employed	17 8 months	Foster care	Employed
Mo	17	Hostel	Unemployed	17 9 months	Hostel	Youth Training
Janice	17 3 months	Foster care	Student	17 9 months	Foster care	Employed

Name	3rd Interview Age	Accommodation	Employment status	4th Interview Age	Accommodation	Employment status
Holly	18 4 months	Hostel	Unemployed	18 11 months	Emergency hostel	Unemployed
Jean	18 2 months	Lodgings	Student	18 7 months	Parental home	Student
Kate	18 3 months	B&B	Baby with mother	interview	not completed	
Ruby	18 2 months	Grandmother's	Unemployed	18 9 months	Hostel	Unemployed
Alice	18 3 months	Private rented flat	Employed	incomplete 18 11 months	Council flat	Baby 2 months old
Sally	18 3 months	Council flat	Unemployed	18 9 months	Council flat	Baby 1 month old
Kim	18 8 months	Hostel	Unemployed	19 2 months	Lodgings	Unemployed
Kelly	18 4 months	Foster care	Baby 8 months	19	Council flat	Baby 16 months
Jaz	18 5 months	Council flat	Youth Training	19	Council flat	Pregnant
Tanja						
Jo	18 2 months	Private rented flat	Unemployed	18 9 months	Boyfriend's	Employed
Hannah	18 5 months	Parental home	Unemployed	19	Parental home	E T
Amy	18 1 months	Parental home	Unemployed	18 8 months	Council flat	Baby 4 weeks
Nancy	18 3 months	Parental home	Unemployed	18 9 months	Parental home	Pregnant
Charlie	18 5 months	Lodgings	Employed	19	Friend's	Employed
Ann	18 1 months	Council flat	Unemployed	18 8 months	Council flat	Unemployed
Viv	No further	interviews	completed			
Pat	18 1 months	Council flat	2 children	18 9 months	Council flat	2 children in care
Diane	18 4 months	Private rented student house	University student	18 11 months	Private rented student house	University student
Linda	18 2 months	Parental home	Baby 12 months	18 9 months	Parental home	2nd baby due
Mary	18 3 months	Council flat	Unemployed	18 10 months	Council flat	Unemployed
Mo	18 2 months	Hostel	Unemployed	18 10 months	Council flat	Baby 8 weeks
Janice	18 4 months	Foster care	Youth Training	18 11 months partly completed	With friends	Employed

Chapter 3: Findings of the Longitudinal Study

Section1: Family Experiences Prior to the Admission to Care

Introduction

In analysing the interviews, the approach was to analyse each section of the data in its own right, building up potential explanations of later events, and then to look across all the data through time to see if these, or other, arguments could be supported. This process is what is reported in this and the following sections. Each of the section reports the main findings under key themes which came out of the interviews, and ends with a set of interim conclusions from the findings.

This first section of the data analysis examines the family experiences of the young women prior to being admitted to care. The analysis uses the term 'care' rather than 'being looked after' as this was the term used by the young women themselves. As the focus of this study was on the experiences of young women leaving care I only briefly discussed their early childhood and adolescence at the first interview and this formed only a small part of the fieldwork. The family experience of children being admitted to care was not part of the literature review as I was not aware of its importance at the time. Links to the relevant literature are made in this section.

Family separation

22 of the sample were born into a two parent family. Only 2 were born into single parent families. 8 out of 24 grew up with both parents. 14 out of 22 parents separated. 7 separations took place by the time the girls were 2 years old. With one exception, all remained with their mothers.

Recent work by Anderson into the importance of childhood has challenged the idea of the demise of the nuclear family. Pre 20th century, children were as likely to live with only one parent because of parental death as those in the 1980s and 90s might experience the separation of their parents (Anderson, 1994).

It has been estimated that 1 in 5 children is likely to experience the separation of their parents by the age of 16 (Haskey, 1983) with 10% of older children living with a step parent (OPCS, 1993). Clarke (1996 p.75) found that although the proportion of children living with both parents had decreased to 72% in 1991 only 2% were not living with their mothers. The majority would be living with fathers. She argued that apart from their economic disadvantage, little is known about the long term impact of parental separation on children because of the lack of longitudinal studies.

Research on the impact of the separation of parents on the psychological well-being of children is still in its infancy. Schaffer reviewing the literature on parental separation argued that children experienced anger, anxiety and feelings of powerlessness following the separation. Yet 5 to 10 years later many of those symptoms had disappeared for the majority (Schaffer, 1990 p.157-158). Separation in itself was often not the crucial factor in influencing a child's behaviour in the long term.

"The family situation which may have given rise to the need for separation and to which the child may subsequently return is more likely to be the crucial influence in determining subsequent pathology...The findings indicate that it is the totality of a child's experiences that matters rather than single events. Factors such as distorted family relationships are much more likely to be influential because they can exercise that influence throughout the whole childhood."

(Schaffer, 1990 p.127)

In those cases where parents separated when the girls were very young, there was little mention of the impact of this on them. The young women had little recollection of the actual events surrounding the separation. By the time of my interviews, the separation of parents had occurred some 10 years ago. The analysis suggested that the young women's experiences supported Schaffer's argument. They were very matter of fact about the separation of their parents

"My mum and dad divorced when I was one. He remarried. I used to see him once a month."

(Pat1)

"When I was eight my mum and dad divorced. So my mum was left with me and (my brother) and my dad went off and remarried."

(Lisa1)

It is possible that the early separation was overshadowed by the impact of subsequent relationships and separations. It was difficult for this study to come to any conclusions of the impact of early separation because I was unable to assess the early impact. I did not have access to case files or parent's recollections.

Separation due to bereavement

Bereavements were especially difficult for children. 5 young women experienced the death of a parent as a child. They did not talk about their bereavement in great detail and I wondered whether this was due to the fact that the thought of their parent's death was still very painful.

"Everybody thought of them (younger siblings), they didn't think about me. The night she died we had half the village in our house and I was making cups of tea. Everybody was sobbing and they didn't think about me."

(Lisa1)

"I couldn't understand why he was gone. I thought he had gone because they had got divorced or something. I said 'I want my dad'. I started fighting with my step dad."

(Holly1)

It was difficult to assess the future impact of bereavements.. In 2 cases mothers died and this meant considerable movement for children. Thus not only did they lose a mother they also lost their home and the security of living with siblings.

Contact with absent fathers

Most of the 14 young women whose parents had separated had some contact with absent parents. Contact was often irregular and disorganised, especially when fathers had remarried. The young women felt that the absent parent had a new family who was important to them. They were also very matter of fact about contact with absent fathers and did not express any particular anger about this.

"He wants to start again, cause he was getting married again, he wanted to start another family...I probably saw him twice a year."

(Janice)

When asked to show significant relationships in a chart none of the young women, except 1, showed that they had a significant relationship with an absent father. It was difficult to assess whether this had been the case for many years as the chart was completed when they were 17 years old. Overall, there was little mention of fathers. In 2 cases young women wanted no contact because of what their father had done.

"He went to prison for rape and I didn't wanna have anything to do with him if he's capable of rape."

(Mo1)

"He abused my sister and I didn't want to see him ever."

(Mary1)

Where parents were not married there was less likelihood of any contact with fathers. This was particularly the case for those 3 women who were of mixed heritage. None of them had any contact with their fathers or his family. They had grown up with their white mothers. None of them saw themselves as black despite the experience of racism during their childhood. One woman was surprised to find that her friends regarded her as black. None of them had any intentions of tracing their father.

"I never knew my dad...he knew where I was...So if he wanted to see me ...he could come and find me. So I just gave up then. (There was racism at school). Not any more now. I am not really (Black). I am actually a quarter...I don't class myself as white. I don't class myself as Black either. I never class myself as anything."

(Jean1)

"They used to call me 'wog' when I was little...My mum said ignore them. But it didn't help when they called me. It died down when I was older. Sometimes there are little remarks. I don't feel half Indian."

(Ruby1)

First Key (1987) commented on the problem of identity formation of black children in care. Possibly because the 3 women in this group grew up in white families they did not establish a black identity. They did not see this necessarily as a problem at the age of 17.

Contact with absent mothers

There were only 2 women who did not have any contact with their mothers before they were admitted to care. In both cases fathers cared for them. They differed in their perception of their mother. One wanted to live with her whilst the other wanted no contact and had felt let down.

"I always wanted to live with my mum but it's never been possible."

(Viv1)

The impact of poor parenting and separation on children

Stein (1997) argued that attachment theory could help to understand the impact of the quality of the mother - child relationship. He highlighted the relevance of attachment theory in assessing the impact of abuse and family separation on children (Crittenden, 1992).

“Recent research has also explored how disturbances in attachment are reflected in the way a child sees the world and processes information and how these processes may lead to enduring styles of relationships in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.”
(Stein 1997, p.54)

John Bowlby (1951,1969) was the first child psychiatrist to argue that attachment between a baby and her mother in the first few months was vital in ensuring the emotional well-being of a child. He argued that a child who suffered from maternal deprivation was likely to develop psychological disorders such as aggression and delinquency. The conclusions drawn were that children needed full time loving mothers. The theory was heavily criticised for overstating the case of the mother and child relationship. Rutter (1981) pointed out that the samples for Bowlby’s studies were children who had experienced no relationship with their mothers rather than a poor relationship. It negated the importance of other carers such as fathers, siblings and the extended family. Furthermore, it undermined the role of working mothers using day care for their children. Bowlby replied to these criticisms by arguing that a child’s need for warmth and consistent love was a primary motivation and had to be satisfied (Howe, 1995 p.50). Ainsworth developed Bowlby’s concepts by classifying children into different groups based on their attachment experience. Children who experienced hostile parenting, aggression and violence were said to show disorganised or avoidant attachment. This group would react with aggression and avoidance towards new relationships as well as compulsive self reliance. Children whose experience was characterised by chaotic and inconsistent parenting were likely to develop ambivalent attachment. This would lead to high expectations of new relationships as well as anxiety and mood swings (Ainsworth,1978 quoted in Howe, 1995).

One of the difficulties of attachment theory lies in the implication that poor attachment is irreversible. More recently studies into the adoption of older children demonstrated that new attachments can be formed at a later age (Triseliotis, 1984).

"Up to what age children can form new attachments cannot be said. Precisely what led to those symptoms (school problems and poor peer relations) and what they signify is not known nor can we tell what their implications are for the psychological functioning in adulthood."

(Schaffer, 1990 p.44)

Furthermore, Fonagy et al (1994) have shown that some children show resilience despite poor early childhood experiences. Despite those qualifications attachment theory potentially helps to understand the long term impact of poor early parenting and a child's separation from their parent/s.

The experience of sexual abuse

One of the major impacts on young women and the relationship with their mother's was the experience of sexual abuse. By the final interview 12 young women had disclosed sexual abuse or rape during the interviews which was often difficult and painful. Out of those 12 at least 6 had not disclosed the abuse during the time they were in care. This suggests that the officially known cases of child sexual abuse could be well below the real figures.

Studies into child sexual abuse in the US have examined the impact of abuse on children and their psychological well being Finkelhor and Browne (1986) summarised the empirical literature as follows:

"The empirical literature of child sexual abuse then does suggest the presence - in some proportion of the victim population - of many of the initial effects reported in the clinical literature, especially reactions of anxiety, depression, anger and hostility...However many of the studies lacked standardised outcome measures and adequate comparison groups, it is not clear that these findings reflect the experience of all victims of sexual abuse or are even representative of all those children currently being seen in clinical settings."

(Finkelhor and Browne, 1986 p. 156)

In the same article Finkelhor and Browne (1986) reviewed the long term effects of child sexual abuse on inter personal relationships. The authors cited a study by De Young (1982) who found that 79% of incest victims reported hostile feelings towards their mothers whilst Biere (1984) found victims to be distrustful of others, to be hostile and feeling a sense of betrayal (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986 p. 157). Furthermore, another study by Gomes, Schwartz, Horowitz & Sanzier in 1985 (cited by Finkelhor and Browne, 1986) found that when a mother's reaction to the abuse was characterised by anger and punishment, adolescent children were more likely to display behaviour problems. In general, adult victims were more likely to suffer from depression, self destruction, poor self esteem, anxiety, feelings of isolation, substance abuse and a tendency towards revictimisation (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986 p.162). However, the authors added a word of caution as to the effects of child sexual abuse on adults.

"Research ... is still in its infancy. Most of the available studies have sample, design and measurement problems that could invalidate their findings... Although the studies indicate higher risk, they are not so informative about the actual extend of impairment...When studied as adults, victims as a group demonstrate more impairment than their non victimised counterparts (about twice as much) but less than one fifth showed evidence of serious psycho-pathology."

(Finkelhor and Browne, 1986 p.163-164)

Nonetheless, a study by Hall and Lloyd (1993) confirmed many of the cited difficulties of adult abuse survivors.

The impact of sexual abuse on relationships with mothers and fathers

The impact of abuse on the relationship with mothers were difficult to assess. There was a mixture of anger, confusion and affection. Given the lack of a strong relationship with fathers, relationships with mothers were likely to be important and the focus of discussion. In some cases the succession of a mothers violent partners and alcohol abuse contributed to feelings of anger.

"There were lots of blokes every night and she was drinking. She was in trouble with the police. (Then she remarried). We always had black eyes and he used to do it in front of her and she used to make excuses. But she must have known something was wrong cause it come to the point where I was crying every day ...Me and my sister were being sexually abused...I had a really bad relationship with my mum...she used to say 'you must have led him on'."

(Kelly1)

"I had regular bruises...She has never been there for me."

(Alice1)

Apart from these 2 cases there was less evidence of anger at mothers than suggested from the literature. Some women expressed their love for their mothers because they held the abuser responsible for the disruption of the family.

"My dad is rude, selfish and pigheaded...I love my mum so much it hurts... Every time I did something wrong, he'd hit me or he'd grab hold of my head and he'd whack it off the wall until I stopped screaming...My dad said 'if anybody ever finds out, you'll be in trouble. He used to say that I was evil and that I was Satan."

(Jo1)

Others were angry with the abuser and did not hold their mothers responsible. These statements were taken years after the abuse had taken place. As I wasn't always aware of earlier abuse I did not ask all young women directly about the impact of the abuse on their relationships with mothers in particular. In one case a young woman wasn't sure about her feelings any longer as the abuse had stopped a few years earlier.

"I don't know what to think (of them). When my mum left my dad she phoned here, but never phoned up when he was there. I was okay with her. Now I don't really want to know....I was really angry a few years ago...My dad always goes on about the past. He says it was my fault."

(Diane2)

The young women's reaction to sexual abuse

The women described the physical abuse but few commented on sexual abuse openly. When they did it was often with tears and trying to come to terms with the effects of feeling depressed, guilty, angry and confused.

"I smashed the windows and the furniture...I wouldn't see or speak to anybody and everybody I was seeing was a threat."

(Kelly1)

Disclosures took a considerable amount of time, usually when the tape recorder was switched off. As a social worker I had considerable experience of interviewing young people and abuse victims. My assessment of the young women's accounts was that the detail was substantial and the body language matched their distress. I had no reason to believe that those accounts were not true. In 5 cases where abuse had taken place, the memory was too painful to be discussed in detail, particularly as it had not been disclosed in care.

"I went into flashbacks where something really horrible and bad happened and you go back into it, like a healing stage...I used to pass out and stop breathing cause it was so horrible."

(Hannah2)

"Sometimes I think if I could talk to someone on the phone from far off and not see them again, then it's all out and it's gone and I can get on with my life. Sometimes I get so angry, like if I can see what's going on - my sister being so scared staying at home..."

(Diane4)

5 young women were abused as young children and following their disclosure were admitted to care. If the young women remained at home then they also commented about poor relationships with, particularly, mothers.

Family conflict

11 out of 24 young women experienced extensive family conflict. The young women themselves did not use the word conflict, instead they referred to arguments which left them isolated from the rest of the family. Thus, for this research, family conflict was defined as serious and continued arguments over a period of years over issues such as boyfriends, coming in and going to school which were not resolved and led to the young women's isolation in the family. Barter (1996) argued that family conflict is nothing new in the relationship between parents and adolescent children. Nonetheless, in the majority of families conflict is negotiated and seen as young people demanding greater freedom (Cohen, 1986). Barter (1996) argued that there is a continuum of conflict ranging from acceptable to harmful. The threshold at which conflict becomes harmful depends on each young person individually. Therefore, there is no accurate definition of what is acceptable and what is not. However, conflict in adolescence rarely leads to young people being admitted to care as young people in care make up less than 1% of the population as a whole (Clarke, 1996).

Barter (1996) argued that family conflict was due to 5 factors.

"There was (not) any real anxiety over their welfare, they thought they were victimised and that their parents were unwilling to discuss the reasons behind the conflict or the negative effects...they felt disliked, unsupported or hated."

(Barter, 1996)

Factors leading to family conflict

There were a number of factors which contributed to family conflict, particularly relationships with step parents, not living up to parental expectations, physical violence and a parent's health problems. Extensive family conflict eventually led to care. There was no particular pattern of factors which led to care.

The 11 young women said that they did not live up to their parent's expectations. This made them isolated in the family leading to conflict. The young women described conflict over a number of years.

They felt that they were singled out within the family for different treatment (Hess, 1995).

"We never did anything together. My dad is always at work and when he isn't at work he is cleaning...My mum is always worrying about something, even when there is nothing to worry about. How we are going to pay the gas bill although there was money in the bank. I was always passed on to other people. I've been to a child psychiatrist. I got beat up when I was living at home by a lad really bad. I kept fainting. You know how 13 year olds do it for attention. But I didn't get any. They weren't bothered...The psychiatrist just turned round to my parents and said 'you just need to give her some love and care, there's nothing wrong with her'. For about 2 weeks after that everything I did was perfect but it soon died down...I weren't what they wanted... be a perfect angel, no make up, no drinks."

(Amy1)

"They were fine until I was 13. In their eyes, I was a 'no hoper'...I could get everything off my dad. And in my mothers and brother's eyes I had twisted dad round my little finger....In their eyes it weren't fair cause my dad was earning more than my mum. My mother couldn't afford to buy my brothers things my dad could afford to buy me. We just argued about it. In the end it came between me, my mum and dad and my brother and all of a sudden I was on my own. My dad was taking their side."

(Tanja1)

8 young women living with step parents commented on this relationship. In 4 cases the relationship had been poor and was a contributing factor to the young women leaving the family.

"He treated me like a step child. He hit me. I had regular bruises at school..."

(Alice1)

The evidence suggested that growing up in a step parent family in itself could not account for the relationship difficulties the young women expressed.

In all cases other factors such as the nature of the relationship with a step parent and a mother's alcoholism seemed to have had an impact on the young women. However, this data was collected after the young women had been in care. It is possible that the experience of care, followed by years of difficult contact, could have contributed to their views of relationships.

Research has argued that the relationships between daughter and step mother is particularly difficult and often characterised by friction and conflict (Ferri, 1984; Furstenberg, 1987). The young women here also presented this view.

"When I was 8 my mum and dad divorced. So my mum was left with me and (brother) and dad went off and remarried. He has four little boys by her...Because I'm not her real daughter she doesn't like it. She hasn't got a daughter and that's why she doesn't like me...I lived with him for 8 months until my step mum threw me out."

(Lisa1)

In 4 cases young women experienced more than one step family. The impression they gave was one of changing relationships and parents leaving them behind. This must have created considerable movement and instability. The conflict together with pressures such as money, abuse and serious conflict led to problems.

"My mum got remarried and then she left me (and siblings) with my step dad. He then got married to my step mother. When she (step mother) moved in we first got on with her and then it got worse and it never got any better. It sometimes feels we had a hard time."

(Viv1)

In those cases where there was evidence of domestic violence it was frequently related to a father's alcoholism and health problems. The experience created anger and frustration for the young women and led to family conflict.

"He used to drink lots and lots of alcohol and everything. It just got to him. They took him down to hospital, they kept him down there for treatment and everything."

He was all right when he came back out but then he started drinking alcohol again, he beat mum, my big sister and me around. He always hit us all...every single day when he was drunk... We never were close as a family. "

(Jaz1)

In a further case Jean's mother was diagnosed with MS. The young woman and her sisters were placed on a shared care basis with foster carers for the next 9 years and lived with 2 families. The family separated during this time with 2 sisters going into long term foster care and her and her sister remaining closer to their mother. Jean had taken on the care of her mother and in many ways commented on how this had led to a role reversal with her growing up as the caring parent and feeling the loss of a childhood. Her experience was very specific within the study but demonstrated the possibility of future family conflict over roles.

"... I was the oldest. It gets on my nerves quite a lot. People see me as the parent and mum as the child. But then I get upset because I want a parent and I want somebody to love me, to help me work things through. Nobody is there. I have to struggle through things myself when mum can't be there for me."

(Jean1)

Relationships with parents and siblings

Those who had experienced family conflict did not express the same hate and distress about their parents as those who had been abused. Instead of speaking about their feelings, the young women commented on the lack of care and love of parents, like 'they didn't care', 'we didn't get on'. Their response was that they in turn did not care.

Relationships with mothers were described as poor.

"I went to live with my mum... We used to row. Her boyfriends would come in drunk and all you could hear is them shouting...My mum picked on me...Mum has let me down quite a few times. She's meeting her boyfriend instead of seeing me."

(Nancy1)

Often the difficulties in relationships were highlighted rather than the affection many felt. It was therefore difficult to assess the impact of conflict and whether they felt hurt by the isolation within the family.

Where there was conflict the young women felt treated less fairly than siblings. The issue of younger siblings in particular was referred to. On the one hand they felt that attention and care concentrated on younger brothers or sisters. The effect of this was a reinforcement of the belief that parents had no positive regard for them and showed little care. On the other hand they cared for their younger siblings and valued them. Thus anger concentrated on parents rather than siblings.

Young women's reaction to isolation and being scapegoat

Those women who had experienced family conflict felt like the scapegoat of the family which increased their isolation. Barter (1996) found that this position was established over a number of years.

"Scapegoating not only results in the young person feeling isolated within the family, the person is effectively dis-empowered to make any substantial changes to alleviate or improve the situation."

(Barter, 1996)

Baker's argument, reported by Barter (1996), was that if the young women felt powerless to change their position they began to act out their role in the family and challenged parent's boundaries and rules further. Almost to prove to themselves that they really were as 'bad' as parents had stated. In particular their strategy to cope with the impact of increasing conflict and by the perceived lack of care and attention from parents focused on boyfriends, staying out late and clubbing.

"I got suspended and expelled twice. It was because I was growing up...My dad is a family man. He didn't like girls coming round for me but he hated lads coming round for me. Because he wouldn't let me see the lads I wanted to see I thought 'I'm really gonna piss him off' and I went with lads who had motorbikes and that...My mum, dad and me,

we didn't get on. We disliked each other.... She (mum) was doing my head in. She used to come up with smart comments all the time, especially when I had been on the run. I used to get well angry with her."

(Amy1)

"I just became horrendous, rebellious...I wanted everything my own way...and if I didn't get what I wanted then I'd go crazy... "

(Pat1)

Strategies for dealing with abuse and family conflict

12 out of 24 young women said that they regularly ran away and stayed with friends. This was mainly those who had to deal with family conflict. Conflict escalated and this led to them being admitted to care. Some of the abused young women also ran away but they usually did not have anywhere to stay and eventually returned.

"I just used to walk out and go to my boyfriend's. The police usually picked me up walking around the streets at twelve o'clock cause I'm so small and looked so young."

(Charlie1)

"I was a rebel. I was different (from sister), running away...I was seen as the troublemaker.

(Jaz1)

Running away and effectively being missing could lead to young women becoming very vulnerable. A recent report by Centrepont and the Suzy Lambert Trust (1996) commented on this issue.

"There is no national reliable data on the numbers of children and young people who go missing...Many vulnerable young people are (then) either simply placed in accommodation, left without support or denied help...Research shows that it is characteristic of many paedophiles to target areas of employment or volunteering which give them access to children and young people...There is a lack of resources for those who work with the vulnerable. There are only a small number of refuges for young runaways."

(Centrepont, 1996)

Those who had been running away regularly found themselves in danger. One young woman was approached for prostitution and another was raped.

"I started running for about two months, going out for weeks. I slept in parks. I slept in garages...And I actually got beaten up quite badly...I was taken to a house. He wanted me to be a prostitute and pay for the rent...The police found me."

(Jo1)

"I stayed in ... with my boyfriend. I was reported missing but they didn't find me. Nobody knew where I was...I used to phone up every two weeks 'hi, mum, it's me. I am all right, bye!' They were worried about me but I had so much fun, I didn't care...I stayed with...he locked me in and raped me."

(Tanja1)

These statements suggested that the young women were vulnerable. This was a point also made by Newman, (1989) who argued that runaways were vulnerable and when running away did not realise how dangerous this could be.

Overall, my conclusions from this first section were that factors such as the early separation of parents and money problems did cause disruption in the young women's lives. However, this and the subsequent loss of contact with fathers was not itself what caused distress.

There were a number of different combinations of factors such as sexual abuse, a mother's violence and/or sexual promiscuity and a step parent's violence which led to poor relationships with mothers in particular. Where the young women stayed at home until their teen years, different combinations of physical and sexual abuse, a parent's alcoholism and not living up to their parents' expectations led to family conflict and subsequently care. Often the young women had felt scapegoated and isolated for a number of years. Given the experience of abuse, neglect and family conflict, the majority of the sample felt a mixture of anger, confusion and abandonment. A number used running away as a strategy to deal with family conflict and abuse but this put them at risk of physical and sexual harm by strangers. Stein (1997) and Howe (1995) pointed out that attachment theory could help explain the long term effects of the nature of family relationships and the young women's reactions to abuse and conflict. Further research in this area is required to deepen our understanding of family relationships and young people's reactions to abuse and family conflict. This might also assist practitioners in developing effective interventions in families where children have experienced abuse and/or family conflict.

Given the early experience of disruption, anger, confusion and hurt, these young women would require stability and support in care to help them deal with their childhood.

Section 2: Care Experience

Introduction

This analysis is based on the information gathered at the first and fourth interviews. The first interview was conducted with 24 young women of whom 18 completed the final interview. The first interview asked the young women to describe the process of being admitted to care and the care experience. I was particularly interested in the number of foster and residential placements, the relationships with carers and the reasons for placement breakdowns as these had been highlighted in chapter one. I also asked the young women about their relationship with social workers and their involvement in decision making processes. The evidence was gathered retrospectively and from memory.

Those who had been admitted to care as teenagers remembered most of the foster and residential placements they had stayed in. Those who had been in care since the age of 2 found it more difficult to remember earlier foster placements.

The care experience was only addressed in the first interview to establish a profile of the sample. The following 2 interviews concentrated on the process of leaving care and during the second interview being in care was only discussed with the 8 young women who were still living in foster care. By the third interview only one young woman was living in foster care. This process is analysed under the heading 'fostering experience'. The final interview took place when the young women were at least 18 and a half. All the young women had left their last care placement, either foster, residential, or a with a relative. The interview looked back and asked them to evaluate the care system generally, in the light of the events of the past 18 months. The changes in their views are described at the end of this chapter.

The small sample did not allow for a detailed comparison with existing studies, but there was the suggestion of support for existing studies. For example, for most young women the admission to care was difficult, raising anxiety and feelings of rejection.

The majority experienced multiple placements including a large number of foster home breakdowns. Most of the cohort described their care experience as difficult even when they had been in long term foster placements. The young women did not feel involved in decisions made about them and the majority described poor relationships with social workers.

There were differences among the sample in their experience of the care system. In particular some showed evidence of maintaining placements because they felt that it was in their best interest. These young women may have been able to negotiate conflicts. Others moved through a succession of foster homes characterised by conflict. There was little evidence that these young women could negotiate conflict or foresee the implications of sudden moves.

There was also evidence of differences in the relationships with parent/s among the sample. Most young women in care due to family conflict had regular contact with either parent. The majority of those with no contact had been abused. There was little evidence that the difficult relationships with parents were addressed by social workers or foster carers.

The sample voiced their strongest feelings about the effects of foster home breakdowns, relationships with social workers and the cumulative effect of being in care.

The following is a brief profile of the sample.

Table 2.1

<i>Ethnicity</i>	
Ethnicity	Number
White	20
Asian	1
Mixed Heritage	3
Total	24

The majority were of White/European origin, 1 was of Asian origin and 3 of mixed heritage. Those of mixed heritage grew up in white families because their mothers were of White/European origin. In 2 cases the father was of Asian and in 1 case of African Caribbean origin. Because of the small sample a comparison with other studies was not viable.

Table 2.2

Age at the most recent admission to care

Age at the most recent admission	Number
0 - 4	4
5 - 10	1
11 - 13	2
14+	17
Total	24

The majority remained in care after initial admission. 5 out of 24 experienced more than one admission. The median age at the point of admission to care was 14 years, supporting Rowe et al's argument (1989 p.3) that this was a particular vulnerable age for admission to care.

Reason for the last admission to care

There was an even split between statutory care orders and voluntary admission to care. One young woman in voluntary care moved into independence at the age of 16 and was remanded to care 4 months later. This placement was coded under "placement after leaving care". In one other case the care order was discharged at 16 after the end of a long term shared care arrangement. After 6 months at home this young woman was received into voluntary care at her request. I coded this as 2 receptions into care.

A further breakdown of the reasons for the admission to care showed:

Table 2.3

Reason for admission	Numbers
Sexual abuse	5
Physical abuse	5
Neglect	3
Beyond control	2
Relationship breakdown	8
Request by young woman	1
Total	24

In the above table the term ‘neglect’ was based on my assessment of the description by the cohort of the lack of physical and emotional care in early childhood. The term ‘relationship breakdown’ was based on my judgement of the young women’s description of family conflict as the main factor leading to care.

Relationship breakdown accounted for the highest number of admissions and all the young women were teenagers. Cliffe and Berridge (1992) summarising research by Packman (1986) found that those young people who were classified as ‘villains’ and whose behaviour was problematic, proved the most difficult to equip with stable and secure placements.

The process of the admission to care

The majority, particularly those who were admitted to care as teenagers, remembered the events well. Those who were admitted as teenagers had more detailed knowledge than those admitted as young children.

Charlie said she was told by her social worker what happened to her as a child and she was able to read her file although the information was sketchy.

"My father was arrested when we returned from India and because of what he did we were taken into care."

(Charlie1)

For the majority of women the emotions relating to being admitted to care were negative. They varied from being scared (2) to feeling upset, shocked and angry that action was taken so quickly by Social Services (8) and to feeling rejected (3).

"They said I was out of control and they put me into care that time...I was too scared to say anything so I went along with it...(The second time) my parents said 'take her'. So from then on I've been in care...I felt angry that everybody hated me, lonely, rejected. I think that was the worst feeling, rejection. A bit of a misfit. 'Why me, what did I do to deserve this kind of life'...It never crossed my mind that I'd be put back into care. Not once...I didn't think my parents would put me back in."

(Jo1)

3 young women felt relieved that they came into care.

"I didn't want to be there. They didn't want me. I was relieved."

(Diane1)

The amount of negative feeling was surprising, given that the sample's experience at home had been difficult. Running away had given the impression that they did not want to stay at home. Nonetheless, these statements gave the impression that they had not wanted to leave the family. I did not ask the young women whether they had wanted to remain at home. After a period of time in care those who had experienced family conflict might have wanted to return home. I was not able to test this assumption because I did not ask them this question. It is possible that negative feelings about coming into care could have had a negative impact on the way the young women related to social workers and foster carers.

Care experience

Table 2.4

Length of time in care

Length of time in care	Numbers
Less than 12 months	4
Less than 3 years	7
More than 3 years	9
More than 10 years	4
Total	24

Time in care was measured from admission to care until the move into independence.. The average length of time in care was 5 years and 7 months, with a median length of time of 3 years 4 months. These figures were similar to those of Biehal et al (1992 and 1995) indicating that well over half the group had not lived with their parents for a significant period of time.

Table 2.5

Placement numbers

Placement numbers	Numbers	Percentage
Foster care	81	80%
Residential care	7	7%
Charge and Control	4	3%
Supported Lodgings	7	7%
Other	3	3%
Total	102	100%

The cohort reported an average of 4 placements whilst in care. The median was 3 placements. This was probably an under estimation as the women could not remember all placements. 'Other' included a temporary stay with friends but not approved as foster carers.

The highest number of placements was 16 but in this case I knew from my contact with the relevant local authority that this young woman experienced at least 20 different foster placements over the past 18 years of being in care. She herself could not remember many of the foster homes in early childhood. One of the young women of mixed heritage had 13 placements.

In the main, placements were made with foster carers in both authorities. The explanations for placement moves and breakdowns are examined under the 'experience of fostering'.

This study showed a higher proportion of foster placements than the studies reported in chapter 1, for example, Rowe et al (1989) and Stein and Care (1986), and it was higher than in studies by Garnett, (1992) and Biehal et al (1995). The large number of foster placements in this study was based on the policy of both local authorities to place young people in foster care wherever possible.

All those of Asian and mixed heritage were placed in white foster homes. The one Asian young woman was offered Asian carers but refused because she believed Asian carers would be too strict. Lodgings accounted only for a very small number of placements. This was surprising given the role they could play in the preparation for leaving care. In other studies lodgings accounted for a higher percentage of placements (Rowe, 1989, Cliffe and Berridge 1992).

Table 2.6

Placement moves since last admission to care

Placement moves	Numbers
No moves	5
1 - 3 moves	12
4 - 9 moves	4
10+ moves	3
Total	24

The definition of placement moves was based on Rowe et al (1989) using only the actual placement moves whilst in care, excluding entry and leaving care. Again, these figures were based on memory and possibly an under-estimation. In chapter 1, Page and Clark (1977) stressed the problems which placement moves can cause. There were a large number of moves experienced by the sample, especially as many entered care as teenagers. I did not ask the young women specifically about the impact of placement moves until the final interview. Those views are examined at the end of this chapter.

The figures in this study were similar to those of Biehal et al (1995) who found that (based on case records) 52% of young people experienced between 1 - 3 moves and 32% more than 4 moves. Only 1 young woman of mixed heritage was represented in the group with the highest number of placement moves, the remaining 3 were represented in the group with 1 - 3 moves.

Table 2.7
Placement moves compared to family conflict and abuse

Placement moves	physical/ sexual abuse /neglect	Family Conflict/ challenging behaviour	Total
No moves	2	3	5
1 - 3 moves	6	6	12
4 + moves	5	2	7
Total	13	11	24

Those who had been abused accounted for the highest number of placement moves ($p<0.01$). I did not ask detailed questions about the nature of sexual abuse and the impact on the young women. Those who disclosed sexual abuse during the interviews were frequently upset and distressed. I only recorded what they said, going into more detail would have been intrusive.

Table 2.8
Placement moves and age at admission to care

Placement moves	under 10 at admission	over 10 at admission	Total
No moves	-	5	5
1 - 3 moves	2	10	12
4 + moves	3	4	7
Total	5	19	24

Those over the age of 10 had overall significantly fewer moves.($p<0.05$). It is possible that movement indicates a large number of placement breakdowns. However, Rowe (1989) pointed out that there were problems in assuming that all placement moves were due to a breakdown of a long term placement because children in care were also likely to experience emergency and short term placements. Thus in determining the impact of significant movement in care, it was important to look at the reasons for movements.

Table 2.9
Reasons for placement moves

All placements	Non Fostering	Fostering Only	Total
Breakdown	9	31	40
Planned End	2	7	9
Emergency	-	16	16
Total	11	54	65

The high number of foster home breakdowns reported in chapter 1 by Rowe et al (1989) was also found here. 2 out of 4 residential care placements ended in a breakdown, as did 2 out of 7 lodgings placements. All placements with friends ended prematurely. Foster placements were significantly more likely to end in a breakdown and only 7 ended in a planned way ($p<0.01$). However, 16 emergency placements made another move necessary.

It is possible that making relationships with new carers was related to the abuse. Those who had been abused said that they found it difficult to trust others but this was not further explored in this analysis. Mary's statement was typical.

"I find it difficult to trust anybody"

(Mary 3)

The inability to trust others could have undermined relationships in foster care and led to frequent breakdowns of relationships. However, the relationship between being abused and experiencing breakdowns in foster placements was not significant ($p>0.05$).

Table 2.10

Placement breakdowns	History of sexual abuse	No history of sexual abuse	Total
No breakdown	3	6	9
1 - 3 breakdowns	4	5	9
4 + moves	5	1	6
Total	12	12	24

15 out of 24 young women experienced foster home breakdowns. Biehal et al (1995 p.22-25) and Garnett (1992) categorised young people in care, into:

- long term settled,
- long term unsettled,
- teenage entrants unsettled,
- teenage entrants settled.

The authors did not give a definition of being settled or unsettled. I defined settled as:-

- one long term placement only, or the last placement lasting at least two and a half years and there were no further foster home breakdowns.

Table 2.11

Classification of under 10 year olds	Number	Biehal (1995)	Total
Settled	4	20	24
Unsettled	2	12	14
Total	6	32	38

The authors had argued that those who were younger when first admitted to care were more likely to settle and this was significant at point $p<0.01$. My sub-sample was too small to compare.

Table 2.12

Classification of teenagers	Number	Biehal (1995)	Total
Settled	5	20	25
Unsettled	13	21	34
Total	18	41	59

In my data, teenage entrants were significantly more likely to be unsettled in care ($p<0.01$).

This definition of settled and unsettled was misleading because it implied that these teenagers had the largest number of placements, but in fact they were not those with more than 4 moves in care. Possible explanations are considered in the following section where the young women’s views of those events are also explored.

Experience of foster care

I decided to analyse the fostering experience of the cohort under 2 headings rather than the 4 used by Biehal et al (1995). I wanted to compare the experience of all those with frequent foster home breakdowns with those who had been settled in one placement.

I anticipated that those who had been settled would be more positive in their assessment of foster care. I also thought that the experience of frequent foster home breakdowns could indicate an inability to maintain relationships. I was able to comment on the experience of foster care among teenagers in particular in more detail than the literature because most of the available studies had concentrated on the fostering experience of young children.

Long term and teenage settled

There were a total of 9 young women who were settled in care. 5 out of 9 were teenagers when they were admitted to care. 8 were in long term foster placements. One young woman lived with her grandmother for 9 years. 2 were of mixed heritage, but their experience was not dissimilar to the group as a whole. 6 were positive about their foster carers. They placed an important emphasis on feeling secure and stable and being part of a family.

"I felt secure when my foster mum used to say 'I love you, you're my daughter'. She used to say it quite often and she still does. I felt secure when she said 'I won't chuck you out'. I felt brilliant and really happy. They all said I was their sister."

(Lisa1)

"They talked to me, they helped me and made a life. Plus they are my mum and dad now...They really class me as their daughter..."

(Kim1)

The importance of being part of the family was also stressed, particularly by the young women whose mother or father had died and who had no close contact with their birth family. In those cases fostering provided a substitute family, which they equated with security. Feeling part of the family was often not addressed by research studies which concentrated on the skills of foster carers (Berridge and Cleaver, 1987). The sample also emphasised being able to communicate and negotiate, particularly those admitted to care as teenagers.

"I was glad to be there. They listened. I was able to talk to them...they were very good. They listened, spend hours talking, they explained how much pocket money I had."
(Viv1)

They commented on the need for 'freedom', being treated fairly, pocket money and relationships with other young people. But these were secondary.

3 described the difficulties in long term foster care. Not feeling part of the family was referred to and this placed a strain on the fostering relationship. They had wanted a family to care for them and provide security. They had found neither. However, they only left after considerable time and there was evidence that they had considered whether there was a viable alternative. It is possible that the long term placement enabled them to develop negotiation skills and maintain a relationship under pressure. All 3 said that they had stayed because there had been no alternative and they didn't want to go to another foster placement where they would not know anybody. I didn't ask how they negotiated with carers and where they had learned negotiation skills.

Diane stayed with long term carers after she was admitted to care because of family conflict. Although she remained for almost 3 years she didn't feel part of the family.

"She says I'm a member of the family but there are so many unwritten rules. If there's an argument I always feel I have to leave. She says I'm part of the family but in the front room there are everybody's photos on the wall, except mine. She says she'll get one of me but there's no space now. It makes me feel left out. We have arguments over pocket money. I asked her but she says nobody gets pocket money and she'll buy me things if I need them. But I buy all my things from the money I earn (working part time after college)."
(Diane1)

During the last 12 months of the placement the relationship deteriorated. Like others in this group, Diane considered the consequences of leaving before making a final decision.

"I hate it I have wanted to leave for a long time. The past year I have made it work. It's better (staying) than moving about. We've had a lot of hassle at the moment; pocket money, clothing allowance and foster sister...I don't know whether I'm best off staying until September or whether I'm better off leaving in June. It depends whether I'm going to poly or not... "

(Diane2)

Charlie was placed with her brother in long term foster care. Both children were of mixed heritage and placed in a white foster family. Her final foster placement lasted from the age of 7 until 16. Over a period of years the relationships in the foster family got worse but Charlie didn't feel she was treated differently because she was of mixed heritage.

" It was all right for the first year (with long term carers). My foster dad, I call them mum and dad, he was all right. My foster mum always used to slap me around for no reason...She used to drag me down by my hair and slam my head against a wall...She was a right bitch. I just used to walk out and go to my boyfriend's. She'd sit down and sit with me for 3 hours...She'd be really sweet and we'd sit down. I'd tell what I didn't like and she'd tell me what she didn't like...but then she used to (do things) when she got angry, she'd do all those things. And she had said like before she'd try not to do those things...She used to pick on me. Even my brother used to say that..."

Both young women left after another argument when they were 17 and 16 years old. They highlighted problems but also demonstrated that they considered the impact of leaving on their education and their accommodation. Diane and Charlie tried to negotiate with their carers but were unable to reach a compromise. Diane left only after a considerable period of time and a move was already imminent as she was going to university.

"I thought I can stay here until I'm 18 but I just couldn't stand it any longer. Then when I found out about all the pocket money and clothing allowance, it just made me feel totally used and I thought I'm not staying here for another few weeks.

We had a massive row because she had been shopping... spending money... She told me to 'f-off' and I said 'right, you've said it', so I packed all my stuff. It was great, I moved to (boyfriend's) parents. No more hassle."

(Diane2)

Charlie didn't choose to leave. Her carer packed her things after an argument shortly after her 16th birthday. It is likely that Charlie would have stayed because she had nowhere else to go.

"The reason I left when I was 16, two days after my birthday, she dragged me down by my hair...because I'd left the dishes and it wasn't my turn. I said I was leaving and she said 'fine, I call Social Services'. I went to school that day. I came back and all my stuff was packed...I was relieved but I was also scared at what would happen next..."

Those who were settled but unhappy in care voiced the effects of this on them most strongly. Charlie moved another 3 times to temporary lodgings before being placed in a bedsit by her social worker. She felt that being in care made her feel on her own and to not trust others.

"I have been to no end of lodgings since leaving home. It feels like being on your own...You feel more insecure... You shift around, you're never in one place for long. You don't know who to talk to. You can't trust social workers not to tell foster parents. You can't rely on anybody and you're not stable."

(Charlie1)

Long term and teenage unsettled

15 out of 24 had an unsettled care experience. 13 out of 15 were admitted to care as teenagers. This supported Cliffe's (1992) point that teenagers admitted to care because of their challenging behaviour could face instability. 9 had been sexually abused. The unsettled group experienced significantly more frequent placement moves ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2.13

Placement moves	Settled in care	Unsettled in care	Total
No movement	5	1	6
1-3 moves	3	8	11
4+ moves	1	6	7
Total	9	15	24

One young woman with one foster placement was included in the unsettled group because it broke down after 6 months and she moved into independence. One of the settled group had 4 emergency and short term placements before being placed with long term carers.

There were some positive comments being made about foster carers. Being allowed to make decisions, freedom and a sense of humour were mentioned by 4 of them.

"They have a sense of humour. They're a lot younger. They let me have my peace...They let me do what I want as long as I don't go over the top."

(Jaz1)

"They were lovely people. They are down to earth, young, fun to be with. They took care of me financially...treated me like a person...They don't treat you as if you are a misfit or a problem child. They help you out."

(Jo)

All 15 had experienced placement breakdowns. Berridge and Cleaver (1987) pointed out that the reasons for foster home breakdowns were complex and in many cases relationships deteriorated over a period of months or weeks. It was rarely one incident which led to an early ending of a placement. The sample placed the responsibility for the breakdown on foster parents. Few looked at the impact of their own behaviour and in the majority of cases they wanted to leave. The issues which created problems in foster families were not always the factors identified in other research studies,

such as relationships with members of the child's own family, siblings, community links and schooling. Rather, the group concentrated much more on belonging - feeling not wanted and being excluded from the family.

Mary found out that she wasn't going to be adopted. Thereafter, she moved through a large succession of placements.

"I was there for 9 years. I thought they were my family. I called them mum and dad. They talked about adoption but then they didn't. In the end he (foster brother) was adopted and I wasn't...I felt hurt and let down...They didn't listen and they don't do what they tell you... "

(Mary1)

"It was very different. They didn't like me. They didn't want me. They didn't accept me as part of their family...They didn't care about me."

(Ruby1)

I didn't ask why being part of a family was so important – perhaps because I had noted that that the majority were in contact with their parent/s. It is possible that the disruption of their childhood had caused them to seek a new family but I did not pursue this point with them. The group of 15 also reported conflicts about friends, not having enough freedom, pocket money and relationships with other children.

"Things started going really bad. She'd start- where I had freedom at the beginning- she'd send my friends away and because I was at the top of the house I didn't know she was doing it. She wouldn't let me use the phone. All the doors were locked in the house, the kitchen door, the living room door... "

(Jo1)

"I thought to a certain extend I would be allowed to do things I wanted to do...I thought I would have more freedom than at home."

(Jaz1)

As Jaz pointed out, those issues had led to conflicts at home and this pattern of behaviour continued in care which then led to conflict with foster carers and also breakdowns in relationships. Jaz commented that she was treated differently because she was of Asian origin. This led to conflict with carers.

“ I had to come in earlier than other foster kids because I was Asian...I felt it was wrong. They shouldn't treat me differently because of my colour.”
(Jaz1)

Most striking was the lack of communication about conflicts in the foster family. In most cases there seemed to be little negotiation on either side. Jo's account was typical of the experience of those who moved regularly from one placement to another. Conflicts emerged but were not resolved through discussion or compromise.

Table 2.14

Conflict at home	Conflict and breakdown in care	No breakdown in care due to conflict	Total
Conflict at home	10	1	11
No conflict at home	3	1	4
Total	13	2	15

Those with the experience of conflict at home also experienced significantly more conflict and breakdown in relationships in care ($p<0.01$). It is possible that young women who had an unsettled experience did not learn skills in negotiating conflicts and making compromises in relationships. These patterns may have carried over from their relationship with their parents but I didn't ask them specifically about this. There was also little evidence that social workers or foster carers addressed this issue. As I did not have foster carer's nor social worker's accounts of the conflict it was difficult to judge whether they didn't try to negotiate or whether they didn't succeed in finding a compromise.

Jo stayed in a number of foster placements. At the age of 17 she was staying with the mother of a friend who was then approved by Social Services for lodgings.

Jo chose this placement and planned to stay. There were no indications of any problems.

"A treats me like a daughter...I can do what I want when I want to and because I can do that I am not doing anything. I am not going out and I am not getting pissed...it's near town, nearer my mum...It's working because I want to be here."

Within a few weeks there were problems and Jo left suddenly. She had nowhere else to go.

"K became pregnant ...we had a big row because she kept nicking my clothes...A was having a nervous breakdown and they couldn't cope with me. I wasn't family anyway and the grandparents didn't like me...It was me saying...'I am going' but she was hinting like every day that she didn't want me there anymore.... "

There was no indication of any discussions about the conflict. It might have been possible to prevent the breakdown with more planning and social work intervention at the time when relationships were deteriorating. It would seem that for many, moving placement continued throughout their care career right up to the time they left care. This could have prolonged instability and insecurity and they strongly voiced the effects of a disrupted childhood and adolescence.

Mary moved through more than 4 foster placements.

"Moving to different homes has been difficult. Foster parents aren't your real parents...I always felt different, moving from place to place...I felt let down by everybody."

Ann had had more than 20 different foster placements. She regarded the care system rather than a family as her home.

"I've been in care all my life but being in care is my home...Foster mums and foster dads and social services have always been my home. I know I haven't had a normal life."

Jaz commented on the disappointment of being betrayed by foster carers.

"...people kept saying things to me, I found out they had been really stirring and saying things behind my back to my social worker. I got sick and tired of the foster parents telling everybody I was in care and what happened to me. I trusted them and I found out they were really two faced. They went through my room and my things and read my diary and everything..."

(Jaz1)

Young mothers in foster care

4 young women were living with foster carers when their child was born. 2 remained there for over 12 months waiting for a council tenancy. They waited because they thought moving would be detrimental to the health of the child. All 4 identified problems in the placement because no specific placement rules addressing the needs of a young mother had been established. They said they had no help with baby-sitting and were unsure who was responsible for providing food for the baby. This lack of clarity led to many conflicts which could have been prevented through clearer policies.

Residential Care

Stein and Carey (1986) highlighted residential care as an important resource for teenagers in care. In this study only 4 out of 24 were placed in residential care due to the child care policies of the 2 local authorities. 3 out of 4 viewed their experience as positive.

"I said I'm not going but in the end I had nowhere else to go. I cried all the way there....I felt this is going to be my life until I'm 18, in and out of this place...When I saw the sort of people were there, I was all right."

(Jo1)

None of them described the kind of abuse highlighted in the investigations by Levy and Kahan, (1989). The young women confirmed the findings of earlier studies, (Who Cares Trust, 1992) that residential care had a particular stigma associated with it because they were placed with offenders.

"I had heard a lot of bad things about it...I thought it did a lot of damage, putting me with all those criminals. I weren't a criminal. There were remands there for things they'd done...I got used to it, I made lots of friends."

(Hannah1)

One commented on the fact that she wanted to be in residential care because she did not want to live with a substitute family. Like others, she emphasised the help of members of staff and friendships with young people.

"In my eyes, they (foster parents) are not my mum and dad and if I had wanted to be with a family I would have lived with my own family...It was all right. They give you more freedom and things like that. There was 16 in our unit. It was great. It was just like one little family. If any of the others got into trouble, everybody else helped out. They treated you like an adult not like a little kid."

(Tanja1)

The residential placements ended when a foster placement or an independent living placement was found. 3 moved from residential care into independence at the age of 16, a much earlier age than those moving from foster care. This might have had an impact on their ability to manage the transition to independence.

Social work support in care

22 out of 24 had allocated social workers at the age of 17 and 6 had specialist workers. The young women valued the support that was given by social workers but only 6 clearly identified their social worker as supportive.

"She was our social worker for 14 years. It was great. She was very supportive and she knew what the situation was...We had to fill in forms every 3 months about things going on at home. Which was good because she actually read them through."

(Jean1)

"You always knew the staff deep down cared about you. We used to get on really well with them."

(Tanja1)

3 out of 24 had a particularly close relationship with their social worker or specialist worker. All of them had moved a number of times and their social worker had filled the position of being the only constant and supporting adult over a period of time.

Charlie had known her social worker since she was 14.

"Since I have had C she has never done or said anything without my approval. Not even the slightest thing...She always talks to me. She only comes when I ask her to or if she thinks there's something wrong...She's been more like a friend than a social worker, she's been like my mum really. She's been ever so good. I can tell her just about everything. She's a bit slow at doing things but she's very good social worker."

(Charlie1)

Being able to talk to social workers and being given explanations were also emphasised by young people in the Who Cares Report (1992).

Supporting the points raised by, for example, Page and Clarke (1977), the majority were critical of the social work service they had received. They felt strongly about workers not getting things done, missing appointments, not being involved in decisions and being let down by social workers.

"I never used to feel involved. She used to ask you questions. And you ask something and it would take her ages to get back to you. Sometimes she just forgot about it. It would never get sorted."

(Viv1)

"She doesn't listen to me, she doesn't understand me and I rarely see her...She's very difficult to get hold off... it takes her ages to find (things) out."

(Diane1)

Given the nature of these relationships it was not surprising that none of the young women talked to their social workers when the situation in the foster home deteriorated. Social workers only got involved after the placement had disrupted.

Others confirmed communication problems as well as being treated differently as an Asian young woman.

"I think she would treat a white girl differently. The times I have to be in. I can't do this, I can't do that. She's not my mother.... She's quite old fashioned. She doesn't want me to have a boyfriend. She doesn't see things from my point of view, she sees my mum's point of view."

(Jaz1)

It was the policy of both local authorities that young people should attend boarding out reviews and the sample said that they attended. Yet attendance at a review did not ensure that they felt involved in the decisions made about them. Supporting the evidence by the National Association of Young People in Care (1983) 11 young women did not feel that they had been involved in decision making whilst they were in care. This lack of involvement was not a new finding but continued despite the emphasis in the Children Act 1989 on the involvement of young people.

"I sit there and it's like you don't really exist to them - they rattle on about you and make the decisions themselves."

(Who Cares Trust, 1992 p.52)

"She was never telling me where I was going or anything. I only once had a choice where I was going."

(Holly1)

It is possible that the poor relationships with social workers could have undermined future after care support.

Identity formation

Though the mixed heritage group had very little knowledge about their cultural roots, they did not see it as a problem and did not seek more information. However, the experience of instability and movement might have pushed such issues to the back of their consciousness as they tried to establish a secure home for themselves at the age of 17 and 18.

Contact with their own families

The earlier analysis of the cohort's relationships with their parents demonstrated that there was considerable conflict as well as evidence of abuse and neglect. Millham et al (1986) had also raised the lack of contact between children in care and their families. Here it was possible to analyse relationships with families whilst in care in more detail.

There were 3 groups:

- those who maintained contact with their parent/s in care,
- those with irregular contact, where relationships broke down and there were periods of up to a few years with no contact,
- those with no contact.

14 out of 24 saw their parent/s every week or month. This included all mothers apart from one whose mother had died. 8 of them also had contact with fathers even when parents were divorced, although this was not continual contact. In all cases there was contact with siblings. The group did not speak of any contact with the wider family and I did not ask specific questions about this. In 10 out of 14 cases there had been family conflict. 3 who had been in care since they were young children had contact with their mothers and in one case with both parents. The sample described mainly contact with mothers. Despite regular contact in all 14 cases, the relationship with mothers was not necessarily seen as good. The effect of family conflict, and in some cases abuse, continued to influence their relationship.

"It was up to me to see her. We don't have a good relationship."

(Jo1)

In other cases relationships were distant because the young woman had been in care for a considerable period of time.

"I saw him now and again. I probably saw him twice a year. He used to give me 5 pounds every birthday and Christmas...I used to see him every month but now the last 4 or 5 years I don't see him as much, probably about maybe 5 times a year at the most."
(Janice1)

There was evidence that where there had been family conflict some relationships had improved due to regular contact.

"I talk to my mum, I communicate better."
(Jaz2)

There were 3 who had very irregular contact with their families with periods of no contact for months or years after an argument. In 2 cases, where there had been conflict, there was initially no contact. All 3 said that the relationship was very difficult. All of them related this back to the lack of parenting they received as children.

"As far as I'm concerned my whole family is dead, especially my mum...She didn't know how to look after us. She never treated me in any way."
(Ann1)

"I had contact with my mum and that made things harder (in the foster home) cause she asked me to live with her and then she'd change her mind."
(Viv1)

The final group of 7 young women had no contact with either parent. 5 out of 7 had been abused, in one case a mother deserted her children and in a further case there had been serious conflict.

They said that their parents rejected them either as teenagers or when they were young.

They felt that they had been abandoned.

"After being in (the children's home) my mum and dad didn't want me back now cause I hurt their pride by being in a children's home and a foster home...she didn't want anything to do with me."

(Amy1)

"I was ... saying 'oh, no she can't be up to any good. She's never been there for you before'... Still feel resentful of her."

(Alice1)

The lack of contact with parent/s also meant that there was no contact with siblings and often the wider family. In only 2 cases was there contact with grandparents.

Given those difficulties it was unclear what the role of parent/s would be in supporting the cohort once they left care. However, regular contact even if it was difficult or irregular, could possibly provide the basis for support in future.

Young women's evaluation of care

The evaluation concentrated on the first and final interview. In addition to their strong feelings about foster home breakdowns, these comments about the effect of the care experience were among the strongest feelings which the sample spoke about.

At the first interview the positive impact of being in care was explained as finding a new family, learning that an abusive family was not normal as well as material things. 6 young women commented on learning about themselves, talking more, being aware of issues and valuing the support of other young people in care.

"I'm glad because I'm away from all the arguments at home...it's made me more open minded, it's made me think about other people, homeless and so on. I'm going to work hard. I've earned it."

(Jaz1)

"I should have made more of an effort...It's only since moving here that I realise what actual rights I've got...you get pocket money and you get clothing allowance....I've calmed down a lot and I've realised that if I stay calm people listen to my point of view. In some ways I've actually grown up a lot."

(Pat1)

10 out of 24 said that they felt they had grown up more and felt more independent due to being looked after. What had made them 'grow up' were the number of placement moves and a feeling of having to look after themselves as the majority fell into the groups of unsettled care careers. They had also experienced family conflict.

"... you don't know what's gonna happen next. You don't know who to trust and who to turn to...I suppose I've learned a hell of a lot...I don't think I would be as independent...It's made me grow up a hell of a lot quicker. It's made me speak my mind."

(Jaz1)

Many raised the issues of feeling insecure and low self esteem, not being able to trust anybody and the stigma of being looked after.

"It makes you really insecure moving around, not knowing whether you'll be sent away."

(Diane)

"Being in care. Having that stigma hanging over your head...having people asking questions all the time 'why are you in a children's home?' Everyday of your life you are faced with the fact that your parents don't want you, every day of your life you are faced with the things that you did wrong and you feel guilty."

(Jo1)

Only 4 felt that there had been nothing positive about being in care and 3 of them had had very unsettled care experiences.

Over the next 18 months the sample's perceptions changed as they became more critical of their care experience. This was possibly influenced by their after care experience. The majority had moved a number of times since leaving care. There had been changes in housing, having a partner, having a child as well as changes in relationships with foster families and their own families.

Although some young women had settled experiences this had not led to finding a substitute family. 3 who had been with a foster family for a shorter period but who had felt cared for, were more positive about their experience. Only one of them had been in a long term foster placement. A small number valued material things. 8 identified that being in care had made them more grown up. These were not the same young women.

"...It's made me more independent, understanding, open-minded."

(Diane 4)

Issues raised by the final interview continued to include the stigma of being in care, feelings of insecurity and low self esteem, not being able to trust others, being let down and not having a family. 13 said that they had been emotionally hurt by the care experience.

"You can't rely on anyone, nothing to call your own. Even when they say this is my house, it isn't my house. I felt different from others (in the family). I have no confidence, I'm never sure of anyone. I've always got to prove myself and be better than other people. I get depressed a lot. I feel different but I can't describe it...I didn't want to be in care. I wanted to be with one family, not loads of families, just one."

(Charlie4)

"The stigma...People think it's your fault you're in care.. not being with my brother and sister hurt me...I get frightened being on my own...It can't give you nice parents because they're somebody else's... "

(Diane4)

Over half of the original group felt that being in care should have made them more independent but in fact it didn't. They did not identify individual factors but pointed to the impact of the system in general rather than actions by individuals.

"I never felt part of any family, foster parents had kids of their own who they favoured...I felt let down because I'd gone into care. I expected a bit more, I expected a family to keep me for life and I didn't have that...They could have given me a more secure environment...It's made me more insecure but a lot of it is my fault as well beating up foster kids...It should have helped me be a more responsible person."

(Pat4)

A larger group of 9 felt that there had been nothing positive about being in care. This included those from the first interview as well as some who previously said they had learned about themselves. Those who cited 'finding a new family' moved into the group of 'nothing had been good'. Those who had an unsettled time in care as well as 2 who were settled said that 'nothing had been good'. It would seem that stability as indicated by a long term placement in itself did not provide security.

"I wanted more stability instead of moving around all the time...different people, different homes, knowing that my mum and dad didn't want me, that made me feel really angry...It damaged my confidence badly. It damaged me trusting people, believing people. I thought no one cared at all... "

(Jo4)

"It's like no security. I've moved a lot, had to get used to new families...It makes you feel you're on a conveyer belt...You're out, the next person in...You're always aware that you're more insecure."

(Kelly4)

To conclude, the majority of the cohort felt that their care experience had been difficult. Those who had experienced childhood abuse and neglect came into care often as young children. Those who had experienced family conflict were likely to have been teenagers. A minority settled in care either between the ages of 9 and 16 or 14 and 16. However, whilst some felt that they had found a family who supported and cared for them, others had experienced conflict and not feeling part of the family. Despite difficulties the young women remained with carers because they believed that the alternative would be a succession of foster placements. It is possible that those young women with a stable care career had learned skills in negotiating relationships and considering the consequences of their actions.

The majority did not settle in one stable foster or residential placement but experienced a large number of foster homes. Foster placements disrupted because of conflict, not feeling part of the family and not trusting carers. Those who had moved frequently in care showed less of these skills and this could have had an impact on the way they would manage the demands of leaving care. Two women had been unsettled in care since early childhood. Due to the limited information available it was not possible to assess the impact of instability and whether these young women had formed attachments with any particular carer.

Social workers could have fulfilled the role of providing a constant source of support but the majority had poor relationships with social workers. They felt that workers were unreliable, not interested and not involving them in decisions.

The majority of women who were in care because of family conflict maintained contact with their own families. The women who had been abused were less likely to have had regular contact. In evaluating their care experience, the cohort felt that care had hurt them because of an unstable adolescence, the stigma of care and feelings of insecurity. A small number believed that managing the difficulties of being in care had made them more mature.

The group's experience could influence social work practice. The opportunity for family work and mediation for those who had experienced family conflict was not taken. Such intervention might have enabled some young women to return to live with their families, particularly as many maintained contact.

Closer examination of the young women who do not settle in a placement is required and attachment theory could possibly inform such research to establish how these young people can learn to build relationships, develop trust and negotiate conflicts. Finally, there was little indication that counselling was offered to the victims of physical and sexual abuse to help them become survivors.

Given the overall poor care experience, it was clear that the preparation and planning for leaving care would be important in managing the process of leaving care.

Section 3: Planning, Preparation and Expectations of Leaving Care

Introduction

This section analyses the way the cohort experienced planning and preparation for leaving care before moving into independent accommodation. The evidence was given mainly in the first and second interviews depending on when the women were moving.

At the first interview I asked the cohort how they felt about leaving care, the things they were looking forward to and whether they could foresee any difficulties at this stage. The interview took place when they were 17 and 17 years and 3 months old. A small number of them had already moved into independence. However, at the time of the first interview all were still on a care order or in voluntary care.

Planning for leaving care

Since the implementation of the Children Act in 1991 the Department of Health (1995) has emphasised the need for better planning for children in care. At the time of the data collection for this research neither local authority had written leaving care policies, although the Children Act 1989 had been implemented a few months earlier. This was no different to many other local authorities whose leaving care policies were still being drafted in 1991/92 as the earlier literature review had demonstrated, (Bonnerjea, 1990, Young Homelessness Group 1991).

However, it was not only the absence of leaving care policies which made planning difficult. It is possible that workers had addressed leaving care issues but that some of those discussions were avoided by the young women for reasons outlined by Biehal et al (1995, p.32). The authors argued that planning had to be handled carefully by social workers.

"...the planning process required great sensitivity on the part of professionals as it foreground questions about the young peoples' relationship with their families or foster carers and made rejection, or simply as lack of long term commitment, more explicit...In some ways considering questions about their future could make vulnerable young people painfully aware of the lack of support actually available to them."

This was supported by this research when discussions about leaving care initially raised fears.

"She keeps telling me that I will be ready but I can't cook, get up in the mornings. (I'm not) careful with money which I've never been...I won't have the people to turn to."
(Ann2)

"I don't think about it unless I'm made to...All over the past few months it's been 'when you leave'...She (social worker) doesn't really know much about it. When I've asked her she says she doesn't really know...I don't know what I'll do (until college)."
(Diane1)

Neither local authority held specific meetings to plan, for example, the move into independence and the support to be offered. Instead planning was to be monitored through boarding out reviews. There was a lack of clarity by social workers about the process of leaving care. There were no clear plans defining when and how the sample would move, what kind of housing would be available and what kind of financial support they would receive.

Those, who had become parents, knew that they would be housed by the local authority when they were 18 but financial support from social services was unclear. Furthermore, housing could become available at any time making planning difficult.

"I know it's gonna happen but I don't know when...(It's been hard) not getting settled...It could be 3 months, it could be 6 months. It could be a year before they can find me somewhere...I have been really depressed."

(Kelly3)

Preparation for leaving care

The earlier literature review had highlighted the different approaches to leaving care. In this study both local authorities relied on the fieldwork approach to prepare young people for leaving care.

9 out of 24 stated at the first interview that they felt prepared for leaving care. 2 members of the cohort felt that they were partly prepared. They felt that their own life experience had prepared them and that they had the necessary skills. The following quotes were representative of the sample.

"Yes, I can look after myself and my money."

(Mary1)

"I can cope on my own. Being in this place (hostel). You've got to think what food you need and stuff like that. Basically you're independent. The money has got to last."

(Mo1)

Bonnerjea (1990) argued that a field work approach to leaving care left much of the work at the discretion of social workers. Leaving care work could take a lower priority than other areas of work. The evidence here seemed to support this picture. Only 2 spoke of individual preparation sessions or help with specific issues by social workers. This was less than in the work described by Save the Children (1995) who found that young people had gained practical skills.

The report by Save the Children Fund (1995) reported that two thirds of young people said that they had had some preparation for leaving care.

However, the sample was drawn from areas where there were specialist projects as well as from local authority departments. Furthermore, the interviews in the Save the Children study took place in 1994 and 1995, some 3 years after the data collection for this study was completed and 3 years after the introduction of the Children Act 1989. It is, therefore, likely that preparation for leaving care is now more widespread than it was in the early 1990s and that specialist services might ensure a better level of preparation than the field work approach.

13 out of 24 did not feel prepared for leaving care, supporting evidence presented by Garnett (1992) and Strathdee, (1993) that the preparation for leaving care was often poor. The sample felt that they needed more practical skills and better educational opportunities to plan the future.

"No, I need to know that I can have an education, so I can get a job and a place of my own so I can support my family."

(Pat1)

"No, not at all. I think they should cover everything, even like how to get a house in case you need it for the future. I know how to cook and clean but things like bills. If anything like that would come through the door I wouldn't have a clue."

(Charlie1)

This group further questioned the field work approach to leaving care. None of the 13 women in this group highlighted the role of their social worker in the preparation for leaving care. None of the group described specific discussions about moving into independence. They also believed that there was a difference between what should happen and what was likely to happen.

"I know how it should happen. I would want accommodation, so when you leave care you're not out on the streets. Like they should teach you things, like cooking, money...things like supported lodgings. I can't see why they can't put you in somewhere where somebody just comes round to check whether you're all right...I can't cook to save my life...I think it's just the fact that I would need to feel secure in myself... "

(Kelly1)

Table 3.1

	Settled in care	Unsettled in care	Total
Prepared	3	8	11
Not prepared	6	7	13
Total	9	15	24

Those who had been settled in care were no more likely to be prepared for leaving care than those who had not been settled ($p>0.05$). No-one reported that issues such as negotiating conflict and maintaining relationships with foster carers were addressed in the preparation for leaving care.

Specialist and group work support

9 out of 24 had specialist leaving care workers and/or a leaving care group. Leaving care groups were a local drop in offering after care support. The young women valued the support offered but felt more intensive work was required to prepare them adequately.

"To be honest I haven't been that many times. I really enjoyed it that first time. And the next time I went we were talking about safer sex which I enjoyed. So far we've talked about safer sex and racism and that's about it."

(Mary2)

Table 3.2

	Prepared for leaving care	Not prepared for leaving care	Total
Specialist worker	4	5	9
Fieldworker	7	8	15
Total	11	13	24

I did not ask detailed questions about the evaluation of the specialist preparation for leaving care. Having a specialist worker was not significantly related to feeling prepared for leaving care ($p>0.05$). Particularly, the 'drop in' without individual sessions was not seen as an adequate preparation for leaving care by 5 young women.

Table 3.3

	Settled in care	Unsettled in care	Total
Specialist	1	8	9
Fieldwork only	8	7	15
Total	9	15	24

Those receiving specialist support were significantly more likely to have had an unsettled experience in care, ($p<0.05$). This would suggest support for an argument presented by Biehal et al (1995). The authors stated that leaving care projects were not necessarily more successful in ensuring a successful transition to adulthood for the care leavers who participated, compared to those without specialist support. However, projects were generally working with those who had been unsettled in care and had little family support. Thus their task was more difficult and this could also have been true of the young women here.

The local leaving care project in Coventry only seemed to get involved shortly before moving into independence. However, in 2 out of 3 cases where they were involved, housing had been organised and young women were likely to move in a planned way. This was seen by both as their main preparation for leaving care.

Table 3.4

Expected difficulties after leaving care

What would be difficult	Number
Money	13
Lack of emotional support	9
Feelings of insecurity/anxiety	8
Losing a family	3
Accommodation	3
Lack of practical skills	3
Having a baby to look after	2
Loneliness	1
Nothing will be difficult	1
Total number of responses	43*

There were a total number of 43 responses by 24 young women. More than one answer was possible.

The sample regarded the care system as a safety net. They knew that the Social Services Department was still responsible for them as long as they were in foster care or supported lodgings. The thought of even the most basic safety net disappearing meant that they feared the lack of support, financial security and increasing feelings of anxiety and insecurity.

"I don't want to leave care cause I got this place recently and I need help with it until I get myself on my feet, otherwise I will be ending up without a roof over my head...Nobody has actually sat me down and said 'right, this is gonna happen, that is gonna happen' and whatever."

(Jo2)

"I'm shitting myself when I do leave care. It just feels weird. Not turning to anybody...It's going to be hard for me. Living on my own...I'd be rather lonely...I have a few difficulties with money now but it's not as bad as it was...In a way I can't wait to get out of care but in another I don't wanna now. I've been in care all my life. It's sort of like a family to me. I've never had a proper family."

(Ann1)

A small number said that they had not previously thought about leaving care. This could possibly be due to the fact that it was too painful to face the reality of having no safety net. Furthermore, those in foster homes initially thought they would remain. This might have accounted for some of them believing that leaving care would not necessarily be as difficult as earlier research suggested.

Generally, the group had little faith in the Social Services Department offering ongoing support. Only 5 thought their social worker would provide after care support.

Table 3.5

Looking forward to leaving care

What the young women looked forward to	Number
Freedom	17
No stigma	3
Feeling emotionally better	2
Nothing to look forward to	2
Total	24

Most looked forward to having 'freedom to do what they wanted' not to be part of a structure, free of meetings and interference. This was also highlighted by Stein and Carey (1986 p.66).

"I suppose I don't have to go through them whenever I want to do something. I will feel I have a little more freedom...I want to be my own person, do what I want to do."
(Alice1)

"I won't have (social worker) on my back when I get into trouble and I don't have to ask for permission. I feel I can do what I wanna do."
(Holly1)

Although stigma and insecurity had been highlighted as issues by other studies, (Stein and Carey, 1986) only 3 talked about the issue of stigma.

"Having no more meetings, not having the stigma over you."

(Jo1)

Only 2 out of 24 thought that there would be nothing positive about leaving care. This included those who thought that care in itself had been 'a family'.

"I'm not looking forward to anything, just to feel I can do what I wanna do."

(Kelly1)

To conclude, the lack of clarity in planning for leaving care and the lack of preparation for leaving was likely to make the process of moving into independence more difficult. There was little evidence that the process of leaving care had been planned in detail. Both local authorities relied on field social workers to prepare the majority of the cohort for leaving care. As Bonnerjea (1990) had suggested, this led to variations in the level of service provided.

Supporting the findings of the earlier literature review the majority did not feel prepared for leaving care. The poor planning and preparation heightened their worries about what kind of accommodation they would move to and how they would manage financially. Some felt that the safety net which the social services department was providing whilst in care would disappear. They also questioned whether there would be any support from social workers in future. They looked forward to having more freedom once they had left care.

Those who had been settled in care did not feel any more positive about leaving care than those who had been unsettled. It is possible that the lack of knowledge about the future contributed to their anxieties about leaving care. They did not feel that they had been prepared for leaving care in their long term foster home.

These women did not mention those experiences when the preparation for, and expectations of, leaving care were discussed. It is possible that they were not aware of their limitations in the area of decision making and negotiating conflicts or that they did not think that their experience would influence the way they left care and managed the transition to adulthood.

Section 4: The Transition to Independent Housing

Introduction

This chapter analyses the housing experience of the 24 young women since leaving the last care placement. The data was gathered at each of the 4 interviews but is presented together as the sample moved into independence at different ages. The experience of housing and homelessness is examined as well as what led to individuals becoming homeless and what strategies they adopted. I also consider whether and how they found permanent housing. In addition, I was able to analyse the process of homelessness among care leavers in more detail than earlier leaving care studies where homelessness had not been a main focus. The first part of the analysis considers the relationship between the transition to adulthood and moving into independence.

Young women's definition of adulthood

After the first 2 interview phases I became aware that I had not asked the young women about their definition of adulthood and whether they felt that they were treated as an adult. I also wondered whether they recognised the demands of the transition to adulthood. The young women moved into independence earlier than the majority of young women and ,thus, entered the transition to adulthood earlier (Banks, 1992, Jones 1995). Therefore, their transition into independence was accelerated. Given the level of responsibilities they were carrying 21 out of 24 thought of themselves as adults and were aware of the responsibilities they had.

Table 4.1

Young women's definition of adulthood	Number
Being responsible for your actions	15
Being independent/doing things yourself	8
Speaking up for yourself/own point of view	4
Being able to deal with problems	3
Being treated with respect	2
Dealing with money	2
You have to want to grow up	1
Total number of responses	36*

*These responses were based on all answers given by 21 young women at the third and 18 young women at the final interview.

The group understood adulthood to relate to the individual, her actions and skills or abilities. There was no mention of traditional adult roles, such as being a householder, although living independently was referred to. 23 out of 36 responses related to the concepts of independence and responsibility.

"I don't think it's like 'you're 18, so you're an adult', there are lots of adults who act like children. I suppose it's just the way you are, the responsibility, being responsible."

(Kelly3)

The definition of independence encompassed much more than living independently as it related to being independent of others, such as foster parents or parents and making choices rather than living in a particular form of accommodation. They also focused on personal skills like having their own point of view, handling difficult situations and being able to learn.

"Being independent. Once you know how to look after yourself, you get treated a lot more better in all respects. You get treated like an adult."

(Emma3)

Only a small number of young women thought that adulthood was conferred through the acknowledgement of significant adults in their lives. This definition of adulthood by young women was similar to views expressed by young people in South Wales during the mid 1980s (Hutson and Jenkins, 1989).

Table 4.2

Young women's definition of responsibility	Number
Being responsible for money/bills	13
Being responsible for domestic work	12
Being responsible for looking after myself	11
Being responsible for living independently	10
Being responsible for caring for others	10
Being responsible for work done	3
Having no responsibilities	3
Total number of responses	62*

This table refers to the responses of 21 young women at the third interview and 18 women at the final interview. More than 1 answer was possible.

14 out of 22 felt that they were responsible for living independently, either referring to it directly or referring to bills and housework.

"The flat was a great big responsibility as soon as I was 18 that was it. That was a major responsibility put on me. I think that's it really, flat ties in bills and things."
(Jo3)

"Learning to spend my money more wisely now that I've got something to save for and learning to be as independent as possible."
(Pat2)

Young women's perception of 'home'

Research studies into youth homelessness assumed that young people have a concept of home and that they are striving towards permanent secure accommodation. I asked the sample for their understanding of home to assess whether the theoretical definition adopted in this study in Chapter 2 and others (Drake et al 1981, Anderson et al 1993) was in fact rooted in their perceptions. The young women's concept of home was linked particularly to difficulties in their current accommodation. They emphasised the concepts found in the Drake et al (1981) such as the standard of the accommodation, a good state of repair, control and independence as well as having friends round.

Mo lived in a hostel for women where she had been for the past 12 months.

"Somewhere where I can walk in and out of the door. If I want to I can sit downstairs in my dressing gown and watch telly or something, which is what I can't do here. Have my own space, have my friends in...Silly little things, my own front door where nobody else can go in. Privacy when you want."

(Mo3)

The young women's expectations of their first home were moderate.

In all cases they wanted a decent quality flat in a safe area. And many expected that they would have to wait and take what was offered.

Moving into independence - housing and homelessness

In the earlier literature review it was argued that the poor preparation for leaving care could increase the risk of homelessness among care leavers. In addition to the poor preparation for leaving care, this examination found that the way the sample moved into independence could increase or decrease the risk of homelessness.

Risk factors leading to homelessness

Stein and Carey (1986) had argued that care leavers move into independence before their legal discharge from care and earlier than young people leaving home. This picture was reproduced here.

The average age of moving into independence was 17 years and 4 months for the cohort. The experience of the sample compared unfavourably with that of young people living at home as Jones (1987) had found. There was support for the argument presented in the earlier literature review that the young women leaving care had to take responsibility for finding and maintaining independent housing at a much earlier age than the majority of young women living at home. In addition, Jones (1995) analysing material from the Scottish Young People's Survey found that most young people left home finally between the age of 20 and 22. Furthermore, the ESRC study into 5000 young people in the UK pointed out that 86% of 16 and 17 year old females were living with their families (Banks et al, 1992, p.68) and of those young people not in higher education 75% of young women aged 19 - 20 were still living at home (Banks et al, 1992 p. 68).

Table 4.3

Age and the nature of the move into independence

Age and nature of the move into independence	Homeless	Not homeless	Total
Under 17 years	7	1	8
Under 18 years	6	3	9
Over 18 years	1	5	6
Total	14	9	23*

This table refers to 23 young women only because one moved at the age of 17 and 10 months from lodgings to her mother's. She remained there and did not live independently. Her move was unplanned.

There were differences among the cohort. Those who became homeless were likely to be significantly younger ($p<0.05$). The average age of moving into independence was 17 and 1 month with a median of 16 and 9 months. Randall (1989) had pointed to the decrease in age among homeless young people. Jones (1995) analysing material from the Scottish Young People's Survey added that those leaving home at 16 and 17 were likely to leave because of problems at home and subsequently became homeless. This was also found here.

The findings here were also comparable with studies of young homeless care leavers. Kirby (1994a) found that 87% of homeless care leavers had left care before the age of 18.

Among the not homeless group the average age for moving into independence was 17 years and 10 months with a median of 18 years.

Table 4.4

Ethnicity and age at moving into independence	White	Asian and mixed heritage	Total
Under 17 years	7	1	8
Under 18 years	8	1	9
Over 18 years	4	2	6
Total	19	4	23*

The young women of Asian and mixed heritage origin were significantly more likely to move when they were older ($p<0.05$), though the small number of non-whites make the comparison no more than suggestive

Table 4.5

The nature of the move from care	Homeless	Not homeless	Total
Unplanned move	12	4	16
Planned move	2	6	8
Total	14	10	24

Bonnerjea (1990) had highlighted the lack of planning for leaving care. Furthermore, Biehal et al (1995) also pointed to the number of young people moving into independence unplanned. These results were also found here. Those who became homeless were significantly more likely to have unplanned moves($p<0.01$). Only 1 young woman moved into a tenancy.

Table 4.6

Ethnic origin	Planned move	Unplanned move	Total
Asian or mixed heritage	1	3	4
White	7	13	20
Total	8	16	24

The young women of Asian and mixed heritage were more likely to move unplanned into independence ($p<0.01$).

Among the 8 who had a planned move into independence, 6 moved into permanent housing. The previous placement had not broken down but relationships were strained in 5 cases, particularly when the women had been waiting for a council tenancy in their last foster placement.

"A week before my 18th birthday they told me that they wanted me out. Apparently they don't get paid after I am 18...I didn't speak to them after that. I went to work and stayed in my bedroom. I had all my stuff packed for ages...my foster parent said she'd do it and she moved me a couple of days early (to a tenancy)."

(Jaz1)

Within this group only 2 moved into hostel accommodation designated for homeless people. The hostel was seen as a first stepping stone towards independent living.

"I wanted to leave the foster home to be independent, do my own stuff...My social worker suggested this place to see whether I can cope on my own."

(Kim1)

Included in the group of 16, who moved into independence unplanned, were those who had already experienced the highest number of placement moves. However, a high numbers of moves in care did not significantly lead to having unplanned moves ($p>0.05$).

Table 4.7

Number of placement moves in care	Planned move	Unplanned move	Total
No moves in care	1	4	5
1 - 3 moves	5	7	12
More than 4 moves	2	5	7
Total	8	16	24

Table 4.8

First independent placement (including family)

First independent housing	Homeless	Not homeless	Total cohort
Own tenancy	1	6	7
Private lodgings	1	2	3
Bedsit	1	-	1
Family	-	2	2
Friends	1	-	1
Boyfriend's family	3	-	3
Hostel/Dispersed hostel	7	-	7
Total	14	10	24

For further analysis, the categories of independent housing were collapsed into secure and insecure housing. Secure housing was defined as tenancies, bedsits, lodgings and living with family. Insecure housing was defined as staying with friends and boyfriends and living in a hostel as those gave less security of tenure.

Table 4.9

The first move into independence and subsequent homelessness

	Homeless	Never homeless	Total
Secure housing	3	10	13
Insecure housing	11	-	11
Total	14	10	24

Stein and Carey (1986) had found that most care leavers moved into secure housing if local authorities allocated tenancies. In this study one local authority allocated tenancies to care leavers. Those moving into secure housing were significantly less likely to become homeless later $p<0.01$.

Abrahams and Mungall (1989) argued that care leavers without a council tenancy would have to rely on temporary housing and were at risk of homelessness. Those findings were reproduced here. Those moving into temporary housing were significantly more likely to become homeless ($p<0.01$).

There has been a debate about whether some hostels should be seen as temporary housing. Biehal et al (1992) included dispersed housing schemes under secure form of tenure as it often promised permanent accommodation after a period of time. In addition dispersed hostel schemes often provided long term although not permanent accommodation. The experience of the 3 young women in the local dispersed hostel schemes was different. All moved very rapidly into other accommodation. I, therefore, included dispersed hostel schemes with hostels as temporary housing.

Maintaining housing and avoiding homelessness

The earlier literature review demonstrated that little is known about the process whereby care leavers maintain housing and avoid homelessness. This process is analysed here in detail. This group of 10 managed the transition to independent housing successfully. There were 4 factors which helped prevent homelessness:

- They had somewhere secure and safe to stay and valued their independence.
- The ability to carefully consider options and the consequences of their actions helped them to maintain their housing and avoid homelessness.
- They could stay with their families permanently and wanted to remain there. They also received support to help them prevent homelessness.
- They had the experience of making compromises in foster care which may have assisted their decision making skills.

Maintaining tenancies

A total of 5 young women maintained secure tenancies despite difficulties because they valued the security of tenure and did not feel that there were viable alternatives. 3 had a child or children. These 3 had waited for a number of months and this had caused distress. They showed that they made decisions carefully by considering the alternatives to staying but decided to wait because of the needs of their child.

"I waited for months...If I didn't have a baby I would be out of here straight away but I can't. It's not fair on (him). Because he gets upset if he goes and stays at somebody else's house for the night..."

(Kelly 4)

Pat moved into her own tenancy after waiting for over a year with her 2 children in a foster placement.

"I said if something hadn't come through in a month I'd pack my bags and live with somebody else. I just couldn't stand it any longer (in the foster home)...I waited because of the kids."

(Pat3)

The difficulty of having to carry adult responsibilities for living independently at the age of 18 was highlighted in the earlier literature review. Some young women commented about this difficulty and regarded it as a major problem.

"Before you actually move in on your own you don't realise how much you have to pay out. That's the hard part. I thought it would be like heaven till I realised all the bills, the budgeting and everything."

(Ann3)

"Getting a routine, especially money, because I never know how much to spend on food or how much to spend on electric cards. I end up spending more than I should do."

(Kelly4)

In addition, they said that they didn't feel safe in their present accommodation and this added to problems.

"We've got no locks on the back door and there's 4 girls in the house. When I complained the landlord said who'd want to take on 4 girls. Anybody could do the place over. The handle on the back door is broken as well. The door actually leans in towards the kitchen. The front door is as bad..."

(Diane3)

The feeling of not being safe brought with it feelings of loneliness and not wanting to be left on their own.

"I couldn't be here on my own. I am never here on my own at night... It's horrible during the holidays. I hate it cause everybody goes home and I don't."

(Diane4)

"It's all right during the day, I can handle the day because I can go out to the shops or something. It's just at night it gets really lonely...I didn't realise living on your own could be so boring. I just seem to be doing the same thing day in, day out."

(Kelly4)

Often this feeling of lack of safety and security was linked to being broken into and/or being harassed. These young women felt vulnerable.

Jaz had been living in her flat for a few months only when it was broken into.

"I've had a lot of trouble round here. I've had my flat done over, my window put through. I don't want to stay here no more. I don't feel safe...They went through everything. When I walked in here, this flat, the front door wide open. Everything all my clothes ripped up. When I come in now I just check through everything before I go in here...Coping with being broken into (has been the hardest thing in the last 6 months) cause I'm by myself I haven't got a phone. Every bit of noise I get weary...I don't feel safe."

(Jaz3)

During the next 6 months she also faced racial harassment.

"All the trouble. It's going out with a white guy. My ex found out, he's in prison now but his mates they know I'm pregnant and they've been really funny. They come round and cause loads of trouble...Coming up to my balcony and trying to get through my windows and all sorts. They tried to kick my door in.... Then I had a bruise on my face when I got hit by one of them."

(Jaz4)

In their definition of home the sample had stressed the importance of good quality accommodation which they could furnish and make their home. In all cases the council tenancies were in blocks of flats located in the poorest areas of the towns or cities. The poor standard of accommodation was said to contribute to care leavers giving up accommodation (Abrahams and Mungall, 1989).

In this study the location and the standard of the accommodation was identified as a problem by many but none of them considered leaving.

"It's a crap area because these blocks are leaning over themselves and the council aren't willing to put in new windows or anything...It's a mess. I went to radio rentals but he said he wouldn't install it because it's not a good place...The front door is a mess (because of being broken into) when I complained about it they said not a lot."

(Ann4)

There were positives about having your own place such as the importance of independence and control.

"It was brilliant... It's peaceful here. I can do what I want when I want, well sort of. There are things I 'd love to do which I can't because of the kids."

(Pat3)

"I like my independence...although D's mum still does all my washing and ironing and she shops for me. I like being in the city centre, there's lots to do. It's near college."

(Diane4)

These positive aspects were not particularly highlighted in the literature but were important when the young women felt almost unable to carry the responsibilities of living independently. Some considered leaving particularly if responsibility was linked to being broken into and harassment. This was in contrast to Stein and Carey (1986) who had highlighted issues, such as loneliness or poor accommodation.

"The money that was coming in wasn't really enough to cover everything and at the time I was going raving which proved an expensive hobby. And then what sort of happened I made sure when I got my money each week, I was going shopping, getting enough food for me and the kids but the rest of the money was going on raves and not on bills at all.

Then I was upset because of the bills and I couldn't cope with the kids and it was my way of escaping it all and take drugs cause I couldn't afford to go out and have a baby-sitter. I knew I couldn't cope with the responsibility, the responsibility got too much."

(Pat4)

"I thought it would be easier if I wasn't by myself after the break-ins... I thought if I stayed with my best mate it would be better..."

(Jaz4)

They stayed with their family and friends on a number of occasions after their flats had been burgled. None of the 3, who had rent arrears and had been broken into, wished to give up their tenancies. They felt that it gave them some degree of security, freedom and control and they did not consider that there were alternatives other than temporary housing. 2 tenancies were at risk. They could only be maintained if the women could negotiate a way of dealing with those arrears.

"I wanna keep it but I don't wanna live there. I got broken into and I don't wanna be there. People will be after me. I don't wanna live in it but it's something to fall back on."

(Pat4)

Living with family to avoid homelessness

Within the leaving care literature there was recognition of the importance of family relationships for young people (Biehal et al 1995). The most recent study by Leeds University (Biehal, 1995 p. 13-14) found that 23.5% were living with family as the first move after independence and 22% of young people were living with members of their family by the end of the study. The authors pointed out these might not have been the same. Jones (1995) also found that young people were able to return home if education or employment had failed.

2 young women returned to live at home after leaving foster care. One other young woman lodged with former carers before returning home.

All returned home unplanned and at short notice after relationships in lodgings or foster care had deteriorated. They were able to go home because they had maintained a relationship with their parents.

"There had been a row. I can't remember (what it was about). Something stupid. I said 'fine, fine. That's it I pack my stuff'. I couldn't come and wake my mum up. I said (on the phone) 'okay, if I come home? She said 'yeah'. I said 'see you in half an hour'."

(Jean4)

"I didn't want to stay (In lodgings)...I told them I was going. I just turned up and said 'I've come back to live'. She (mum) says 'all right'."

(Nancy2)

They were aware that there would be conditions on their stay or they would have to compromise around privacy, overcrowding, coming in and helping in the house.

"No smoking in the bedroom, have to be in between 11 and half past...She don't like him (boyfriend). I says 'I don't care if you don't like him. I don't like yours particularly but I don't let you know.'"

(Nancy3)

"Mum is not very well at all. (I'm) having to do all the cooking, cleaning and shopping and everything...Mum is quite happy for me to do it... "

(Jean4)

2 felt that they had more freedom at home than in foster care or lodgings. They generally felt that this was their home. Control and feeling comfortable was important.

"I can do what I want, go out when I want."

(Nancy3)

"It's more freedom. I can come and go as I want...It's like it's my house. I can do in it what I want. I don't have to worry about other people's rules. I can come and go as I please."
(Jean4)

All found that there had been some changes. One member of the group felt the constraints of living at home.

"I am finding it really difficult to adapt...I don't seem to be part of the family any more. I said to her (care assistant) I didn't like it (changing bedrooms) but she said 'it's not up to you'. I just feel that all the decisions I used to make I don't have to do and this lady is just come in and taken over...Every time we have an argument it's my fault."
(Jean1)

She stayed because of the lack of alternative secure housing. A local voluntary organisation offered a place in a hostel but Jean didn't want to go. This meant all were living with mothers at the end of the study period.

"I felt it was a dead end situation. I was upset. It wouldn't have been so bad if I could have claimed Income Support. (The voluntary organisation) said I could but the DSS said I couldn't."
(Jean3)

Lodgings

One member of the group lived in lodgings. Unfortunately, I lost contact after the first interview and wasn't able to comment on the placement in detail. She had found the room through a friend at work and was happy to stay there for some time.

By the final interview I knew the accommodation of 8 out of 10. 5 maintained their council tenancies and 3 were living with their mothers. Maintaining their accommodation meant that this group experienced very few moves (Table 4.11).

Homelessness after moving into independence

The earlier literature review argued that relatively little was known about the reasons for homelessness among care leavers. Authors, for example, O'Mahony (1988) had pointed to the combination of the lack of a housing policy which did not prevent homelessness and care leavers lack of personal skills because of their poor care experience. There was support for this argument in the analysis of the experience of the 14 young women who became homeless. In addition, the detailed examination showed an unplanned move into independence. This group relied on temporary arrangements, as O'Mahony (1988) had suggested, which failed. Furthermore, additional factors, such as frequent relationship breakdowns, harassment and domestic violence led to continual homelessness which was striking. Out of this group the housing situation of 12 out of 14 was known at the fourth interview. 4 were still homeless and 8 had found housing through the homelessness legislation or their families. Biehal et al (1995 p.51) found that 22% of their sample had experienced homelessness. Whilst this was a significantly lower figure, it was not possible to pursue this comparison as the authors failed to give a definition of homelessness. In addition the sample size in this study would have made a comparison difficult. No data was given by Biehal et al (1995) listing details of the final accommodation of care leavers. It, therefore, wasn't clear how many of the 22% remained homeless at the end of their study.

There has been an ongoing debate over the definition of homelessness as outlined in, for example, Watson and Austerberry (1986) and later by Hutson and Liddiard, (1994). Rather than referring to temporary housing as homelessness, Biehal et al (1995) described other forms of housing such as lodgings, hostels and friends as transitional. They found that 53% of young people moved into this form of accommodation. Jones (1995 p.110) defined this as 'intermediate households'.

Transitional housing gives the impression that young people finally moved into permanent housing or as Jones found, return home. In this study not all the young women could necessarily rely on finding permanent housing neither were they able to return home. Furthermore, all the young women in temporary housing made a number of further moves.

The term transitional housing seemed to cloud the issue as it implied that this phase of housing would end soon. It underestimated the impact of the potential length of homelessness and the lack of choice of appropriate accommodation.

Biehal et al (1995) argued that transitional housing, if it was supported, could offer the advantage of making the transition to independence easier. However, a significant sample in their study was taken from specialist schemes where support was aimed at enabling care leavers to live independently. The cohort in this study did not always choose supported housing, such as hostels, as a stepping stone towards independence. Instead, they were forced into this in the absence of a viable alternative. Furthermore, all hostels in the area were aimed at homeless young people, classifying young women immediately as homeless.

Since the literature review was completed, studies into youth homelessness have further analysed the process of becoming homeless. Hutson and Liddiard (1994) found that homelessness careers could be divided into 3 phases: early, middle and late phase. They argued that the early phase included stays with friends and relatives after accommodation was lost. The middle phase saw more use of hostel type accommodation and longer periods of sleeping rough. By the late phase sleeping rough had increased as had the use of traditional types of hostels. This picture was not found here. Hostel accommodation and, for a small number, boyfriends were important in the early stages of moving into independence. At a later stage was there evidence of staying with friends and relatives and partners in an emergency. None of the young women said that they had slept rough (see Anderson et al 1993). However, given the small and specialist sample in this study, a comparison with a general youth homelessness study was difficult.

1st Route: Moving into temporary housing

Those who moved into temporary housing firstly moved to hostels (7) and their boyfriend's family (3) and lodgings with friends (1) (Table 4.8). Some were not allocated a council tenancy because the housing department did not have an arrangement with the Social Services Department.

Others moved from care unplanned and had no other alternatives but to stay in hostels or with their boyfriend's families.

Living in hostels

Saunders (1986) and Drake et al (1981) had found that hostels were a significant form of emergency accommodation for homeless young people with nowhere else to go. The use of hostels by homeless young people has continued, (Anderson et al, 1993, Kirby, 1994a). In this study hostel stays led to evictions and further temporary arrangements.

7 young women moved into hostels as their first move into independence and were joined by another young woman who was lodging and subsequently became homeless. Hostels were temporary and often necessitated further moves. 8 members of this group experienced 18 stays in hostels, 4 young women stayed more than once.

The move to hostel accommodation was not part of a planned move into independence as 6 out of 8 young women moved into hostel accommodation after their previous foster placement ended in conflict. They were referred by their social worker in all but one case.

"I felt I was just left there...I didn't have any choice in the matter of going there. I was sent there. I didn't wanna go there. They couldn't be bothered to find me anywhere else to live cause they thought I was only doing things so I could stay in care. I didn't I wanted somewhere decent to live. I never had any security to start with."

(Amy1)

In this local area there was a variety of hostel accommodation. All hostels and dispersed hostels were run by the voluntary sector. Excluding the nightshelter most hostels offered a furnished room, shared kitchen, bathroom and lounge facilities. Only 2 hostels had shared bedrooms. 24 hour staff cover was provided in some. Each hostel scheme had its own rules. 5 of the 8 young women stayed in the same hostel for women but not necessarily at the same time. Apart from the women's hostel all others were used only temporarily. Half the hostel stays were less than 10 weeks.

The sample made similar criticism of hostel accommodation which other studies had pointed to, (Anderson et al, 1993).

Conflict with other residents was raised by 7 out of 8 women. In some cases it led to wanting to leave.

"Trouble with the girls, arguments over lads, racism, something stupid... One girl who has just moved in has caused nothing but trouble and she's only been here a few weeks. She asks people what they think of so and so and then she goes back and tells them, plays against everybody, shit stirring. It's not fair."

(Mo3)

In addition, the lack of privacy and restrictions on boyfriend's staying was the main focus of complaints about the women's hostel.

"It's embarrassing. You can't have no privacy. You're not allowed in your room so we go out at night...You can't talk anywhere, you can't have a private conversation, somebody always walks in."

(Kim 2,3)

"I want to go today... You're not allowed any physical contact with your boyfriend, no kissing, no cuddling...Me and S are having problems cause we've got nowhere else to go except his mates house. We've got no privacy and no time on our own... It puts a big strain on me cause I get moody about it."

(Mo3)

They also said that living with other people meant that they could still be lonely.

"Yes. I get lonely when ...isn't here. I'm going to be dead lonely for 2 weeks. I just sit here, doodle or write letters or ...just do something."

(Holly4)

"It was horrible at first without your family and friends. I miss my home comforts...being lonely, not getting in touch with friends."

(Viv2)

The positive comments were much briefer than the descriptions of the difficulties. They emphasised the control and independence of living independently as well as the company of others and help of wardens.

"Doing what I like. It's like being able to do what I want, come and go as I please."

(Ruby4)

"My own room and people to talk to."

(Kim1)

For those who had previously been without any secure accommodation a longer term hostel provided some safety.

"Feel safe and secure. You've got help if you need it "

(Ruby4)

Help, time and advice by warden's was often seen as positive but they were aware that staff had a function of control. Staff weren't always able to resolve difficulties between residents. None of the women commented on help by staff in moving them into permanent accommodation.

"She makes sure everybody is in.. she's all right. If you've got a problem you can go to her but I never do."

(Ruby4)

"Staff help you with your problems. We get on with them all right. You can have a wicked laugh with some of them...being able to ask for advice."

(Viv1)

The young women regarded emergency hostels as unsafe and of a poor standard.

"I was just really scarred, the men really, people climbing through bedroom windows. The food was disgusting."

(Viv2)

"I went to the YM. It was all right but I couldn't live with 85 lads. I couldn't relate to them all. There was eight floors to it. I was sort of trapped between all the lads and that."

(Holly3)

These criticisms of hostels did not lead to any of them leaving. They were evicted predominantly for conflict with other residents and an additional reason such as rent arrears or breaking rules.

"The reason I'm not at the hostel is because of rent arrears and there was too much hassle there. All the girls got on my nerves, all the bitching. I owe about £100."

(Kim3)

Those who experienced conflict with residents without additional incidents were likely to leave rather than be evicted.

"I really hated it. I was getting loads of hassle from next door all the time, asking me to baby-sit every night and they threatened to smash my face in (and) kept banging on the door... Loud music all night long, slamming doors shut... She chucked a bottle of wine over me. ..It was horrible."

(Mary3)

Leaving a hostel because of conflict with other residents and arrears was not a point highlighted in the earlier literature review, possibly because existing studies into hostels had focused on the structure and physical conditions of hostels rather than examining the process of homelessness.

Those who left because of conflict and breaking rules had experienced similar difficulties in their final foster placement (Table 4.15). Again they left in crisis with no alternative accommodation easily available. This meant that, for the majority, hostel stays led to further temporary housing such as Bed & Breakfast establishments, family or other hostels.

Living with a boyfriend's family or boyfriend

This form of accommodation was significant for the cohort but not recognised in the studies reported in the earlier studies by, for example, O'Mahony. Neither was it mentioned in the survey by Leeds University of care leavers (Biehal, 1992). Only Jane Dibblin (1991), reported that homeless young women were more likely to stay with partners. The nature of this accommodation was highly unstable and temporary for the cohort. 3 women moved in with their boyfriend or his family as their first move into independence. None of these were joint tenancies. Their stay ended because of their partner's violence and a relationship breakdown. The average stay lasted for 9.5 weeks with a median of 4 weeks. In the majority of cases partners suggested the move and in only 2 women asked to move in. Apart from one, none of the others had another option at that particular time.

"She always said that if S had an argument than he should come over. I packed them (clothes) and .. just left (foster home)."

(Linda2)

All 3 young women were initially happy about the move.

"I just get on well with all of them, really. Nothing is difficult about living here. We do washing, tidying up, washing up...No, I don't miss anybody."

(Linda2)

All of them experienced either violence or a poor standard of accommodation.

"He tried to strangle me. He tried to kill me and I don't know how many times...They (his parents) knew but they decided not to get involved. I didn't get on with them. I had very little help with (baby)."

(Kate3)

The stay with a partner ended as suddenly as it had been arranged. In all cases the young women had to leave once the relationship had broken down. Only 1 out of 3 moved into a permanent joint tenancy after living with her partner's family. 2 went to live with their family. One of the 2 later became homeless again.

Route 2: Moving into secure housing and losing it.

Renting in the private sector

Thornton (1990) had shown the problems of renting in the private sector. Only a few young women leaving care had the financial income to rent in the private sector. 2 held a tenancy and 1 moved into a bedsit, (Table 4.8). They were 17 years old when they took on the tenancy. They had difficulties controlling friends, financial debts which accumulated, repeated break-ins and harassment. In all cases tenancies had been encouraged by social workers.

"She (social worker) said 'I think you ought to try and find your own place because I think you're ready. You find it, we'll pay'."

(Jo2)

There were similarities with those who held permanent tenancies in terms of the responsibility of living independently. In addition, this small group also experienced break-ins and harassment.

"I've been broken into twice, they've got in twice now while I was in bed. I get extremely lonely and depressed quite a lot of the time. (Social worker) pushed me into it. The flat was a big responsibility...bills and that."

(Jo3)

"I was used to everything being done for me, my bills being paid, my meals being there."

(Amy2)

The standard of accommodation also meant that they were unhappy to stay for long.

"No, I mean how can you bathe a baby in a shower. It leaks, it's horrible. It's all mouldy down in the bedroom...the tap in the kitchen leaks and is coming from the wall. Even if I did want to stay here I wouldn't want to bring my children up here. They (neighbours) are drug pushers...It's just a rough area."

(Alice3)

In addition to bills they faced financial problems because they could not afford the high rents. This made the tenancies insecure throughout their stay.

"I've known all along that I won't be able to afford it. Well, I thought I would get enough help and then I thought I could manage but then I realised and I kept complaining to Social Services that I wanted a council flat."

(Alice3)

They were worried that given their history of movement they would lose the accommodation eventually.

"I don't feel that secure here. I feel everything else has gone wrong for me, something is going to go wrong now. Somebody is going to turn round and say 'well, you can't stay here any more'. It worries me to death because I think it will break my heart if I had to leave here."

(Jo2)

They also felt that there were advantages to having independence and a place of their own.

"I like being my own boss. Doing what I want, not having to worry about anybody moaning at me. Being able to do the place as I want, being able to think to myself...Now I'm doing it for me and it makes me feel good about myself. You know the way that I look at things is the way the flat looks."

(Jo2)

Abraham's and Mungall (1989) reported that care leavers gave up tenancies because they were lonely or the accommodation was of a poor standard. This picture was not found here. Biehal et al (1995) found that young people often lacked independent living skills in managing permanent tenancies and subsequently became homeless. The authors argued that homelessness remained a problem because there was no secure accommodation available. 3 women in this study became homeless after losing a tenancy. They faced some of the same difficulties as those who had permanent council tenancies. However there were important differences which led them to give up their tenancy. Firstly, they had rent arrears because they could not afford the rent without Social Services subsidy.

Jo lost a tenancy and her account mirrored that of the other young woman. Social Services had paid the deposit and rent in advance for both. Housing Benefit did not cover the total rent on both one bedroom flats and Social Services made a topping up payment. Both of those payments stopped on the women's 18th birthday leaving them with rent arrears and possible eviction. Jo had been broken into twice and was scared to stay at the flat. In addition her rent arrears had built up because she only had £23 allowance from Social Services for her living expenses and bills.

"I have rent arrears...£200 of (my savings) has gone on paying off bills and in a way I was really, really hurt that I had to part with it for something that (social worker) pushed me into in the first place saying 'you can do it'."

(Jo3)

Secondly, the tenancies were given up after serious incidents of domestic violence, harassment and being broken into. The young women did not take those decisions lightly but felt that the harassment had gone too far to be able to rescue their tenancy. At the same time rent arrears had usually built up as well. They did not receive the financial and emotional support to maintain their tenancy.

Amy lost her council tenancy. This was because she had been broken into twice, the flat had been severely damaged and she had problems in controlling the behaviour of friends.

"The last time I didn't live on my own. The whole of the (town) lived with me. Everybody lived with me. People was in my flat more than I was. Cause I didn't wanna say no cause I was used to having people about. You know living with people and all of a sudden I got put in a flat on my own and I got bored. He (ex boyfriend) come round, smashed up the flat. He'd written all over the walls...Nigger lover and all that lot. So I left."

(Amy2/4)

These reasons for homelessness were also confirmed by Jones (1995) and Hutson and Liddiard (1994) and Kirby (1994a).

Lodgings

The homelessness literature , for example, Thornton (1990) and Saunders (1986), did not recognise lodgings as a major source of accommodation for young people. Yet lodgings have been used by Social Services Departments to prepare young people for leaving care or to provide semi-independent accommodation. Garnett (1992 p.78) found 15% of young people in lodgings after leaving care.

Since the early 1990s there has been an increase in lodgings schemes, primarily funded under Section 73 of the Housing Act 1985. There have been concerns about the standard of accommodation provided by lodgings schemes and charitable trusts have sponsored good practice models, for example, Centrepoint (Button, 1994).

In this study lodgings were arranged by the 4 women themselves as the first or second move into independence.

"Then J from work said 'you can stay at my house'. I thought he was joking but then the next day he said 'I had a word with my misses. You can come if you want to'."

(Charlie1)

"I moved out of my nan's. I think she was getting too old. She could cope without me, so. She wanted me to go. She says 'you might as well move in with ...(lodgings) if you want.'"

(Ruby4)

None of the placements were registered with a voluntary agency or Social Services. 2 were of mixed heritage. The accommodation lasted between 4 and 16 weeks but in one case for over 2 1/2 years. For this group lodgings was not seen as a particularly stable form of accommodation. It depended on the relationship with the provider. In 2 cases there was evidence of sexual harassment involving both the young women of mixed heritage.

"I had to go cause I didn't get on with him... He is just a pervert. Walk around with no clothes on and watches dirty videos and always making comments. He used to come and stand in my bedroom while I was asleep...."

(Charlie4)

"She came back and her boyfriend told her that I'd been trying it on him, so she kicked me out. I never tried it on him."

(Ruby4)

The evidence of harassment suggests that lodgings can be dangerous for vulnerable young people if the accommodation is not inspected or registered by an agency. This has been particularly recognised after the investigations into the Cromwell Street murders and was highlighted by Centrepont in 1995 in a press release on the verdict in the Rosemary West trial.

After their stay in lodgings 3 out of 4 became homeless and made temporary arrangements with boyfriends and friends. As the numbers were very small it was not possible to comment on the suitability of lodgings as semi-independent accommodation.

A cycle of moving through temporary accommodation when homeless

Table 4.10

All types of housing stayed in since moving into independence

Types of housing stayed in since moving into independence	Number of young women	Total number of placements
Tenancy	12	16
Private lodgings	6	7
Bedsit	2	2
Family/Foster carers	11	15
Friends	6	10
Boyfriend/Boyfriend's family	8	10
Hostel/Dispersed hostel	8	18
Bed and Breakfast establishment	5	6
Total	24*	84

*This table refers to the accommodation of 24 young women who could give more than one answer.

Table 4.11

Number of moves after moving into independence	Homeless	Not homeless	Total
Up to 1 move	1	8	9
2 - 3 moves	5	2	7
More than 4 moves	8	-	8
Total	14	10	24

By the time the 14 homeless young women were 19 years old they had stayed in 68 different places and moved 54 times between them. Those who were homeless moved significantly more than those not homeless ($p<0.01$). The average length of stay in one place during the 18 months of the fieldwork was 16 weeks in an average of 5 places.

Table 4.12

Movement in care and after moving into independence among homeless young women

Number of moves after moving into independence	No moves in care	1-3 moves in care	4+ moves in care	Total
1 - 3 moves	2	1	3	6
More than 4 moves	1	5	2	8
Total	3	6	5	14

Those who had fewer moves in care did not have significantly fewer moves after living independently ($p>0.05$).

Table 4.13

Number of moves after moving into independence	Settled in care	Unsettled in care	Total
No moves	2	5	7
1 - 3 moves	5	4	9
More than 4 moves	2	6	8
Total	9	15	24

Having been unsettled in care did not lead to significantly more movement in independence than having been settled in care.

Table 4.14

	Settled in care	Unsettled in care	Total
Homeless	5	9	14
Not homeless	4	6	10
Total	9	15	24

I also examined whether a settled experience in care was related to less homelessness later, but this was not the case ($p>0.05$).

Table 4.15

Relationship breakdown in care and reasons for moving after leaving care among homeless young women

Relationship breakdown and end of placements	Relationship breakdown in care N=12	No relationship breakdown in care N=2	Total N=14
Rent arrears and relationship breakdown	4	2	6
Relationship breakdown and eviction	6	1	7
Violence/sexual harassmt and relationship breakdown	7	1	8
Total*	17	4	21

*The total number this table applies to is 14. The young women were able to give more than one answer.

Thornton (1990) argued that once homeless the structure of the housing market prevented young people from finding permanent housing. This analysis was supported by Biehal et al (1995) who also argued that care leavers became homeless because the structure of the housing market prevented them from finding permanent housing. These findings were to some extent reproduced here. Permanent accommodation was inaccessible because of either cost or housing legislation. In addition, those who had experienced relationship breakdown in care were significantly more likely to experience violence and harassmt later ($p<0.05$). Once they had become homeless the young women used unplanned stays with friends, family members and boyfriends to prevent them from sleeping rough. They had to move in crisis when the relationship broke down. Once they were in a cycle of moves they tended to drift from one form of insecure accommodation to another (Jones, 1995).

"At first I didn't care what I did. I'd go out, get drunk, silly things like that. Went round to my friends...went to my mum's...It didn't work out. Me and my sister fight...went from my aunts to friends, then moved to lodgings...I never slept rough. Most of my friends got flats, so I stayed there."

(Kate3)

"I moved out of my nan's. She wanted me to go. I moved in with (friend). I used to go to school with her... she says she couldn't afford to look after me. I was going out with this lad and his mate ...she was looking for a lodger...Her boyfriend told her I tried it on him, so she kicked me out...I had nowhere else to go so I stayed with this bloke."

(Ruby4)

Only very few of them recognised that this was happening. Even then they could not prevent it.

"The problem with me is that if something goes wrong, I've got to run. I've got to keep moving and I'll never settle in one place for a long amount of time, I've got to keep going...I get bored after a while of the people around me."

(Jo3)

The continued movement after leaving care caused distress. Holly moved 5 times in 18 months staying in different hostels and shared houses.

"Moving around. Just when you get settled into somewhere you've got to sort of move again, does your head in. You feel lost."

(Holly3)

Kim moved 3 times. She left the hostel, stayed at her mother's and her boyfriend's house. In the end a local project found them private lodgings after they had no fixed address.

"It does my head in. I want to stay in one place. I've been moving about all the time. I get fed up with it. All the moving about you might as well stay on the street."

(Kim4)

The following is a brief examination of the accommodation the homeless young women moved to.

Living with Friends

Staying with friends was not highlighted in the early leaving care or youth homelessness literature. In the 1990's there has been an increased recognition of the number of young people, and young women in particular, staying with friends (Dibblin, 1991; Biehal, 1995; Anderson et al, 1993). Anderson et al (1993p.31) found that friends and relatives were the highest cited form of accommodation before moving into a hostel or B&B by over 1/3 of women and 32% of 16 - 24 year olds. Dibblin argued that staying with friends was seen as a last resort.

"However, 55% said they had had to sleep at the house of a friend or relative. Many said this put strain on their relationship because the house was already overcrowded or put them in personally difficult or even dangerous situations."

(Dibblin, 1991 p.32)

In this study 4 out of 6 young women were over 18 when they stayed with friends. The stay lasted on average 11.5 weeks with the median at 6 weeks. None of the moves were planned and happened in crisis.

"My mum and dad went to Ireland and while they were in Ireland ...I'll go and stay with L for a couple of weeks. L asked me to stay and I decided to because she was really nice to me so I stayed."

(Jo4)

Others felt that they had no other option.

"She (warden) gave me thirty minutes to get out or she was gonna call the police. I had nowhere else to go. I didn't know anybody else in ...apart from (them). So I had to go there."

(Amy2)

For most, this accommodation relied on their ability to sustain a relationship. At the beginning they could not foresee any problems. In some cases there were high expectations of the friendship. They were very critical of the arrangement when the relationship, particularly with a friend's parent, came under pressure.

"Shit. Every time her mum come home, I'd have a knife to my throat...Cause L was one of those people who told her mum a lot of lies and I'd get the rap for it cause I used to stick up for her."

(Holly2)

"A total and utter bitch (friend's mother) basically. Treated me like the live in baby-sitter, spoke to me as if I was a piece of shit. She would say things like, if I went out with somebody, she'd say he was a fucking twat...She was asking me to do things and if I didn't do them basically she would get really nasty with me... Another thing was (they) were talking about me all the time, constantly...She was supposed to be my best friend."

(Jo4)

Even when the relationship with her friend was good, the young woman felt uncomfortable.

"I don't really want to stay. It's putting on her, she shouldn't have to. She's only doing it as a favour. I feel safe...I get on with them fine, she's my best mate and he's M's best mate."

(Charlie4)

"We got on all right but I wanted my own place."

(Alice1)

The accommodation usually ended as soon as it began. Most moved when the relationship had broken down, a point also made by Anderson et al (1993 p.71). In those cases where the relationship broke down, the young women had also experienced evictions and conflict in hostels and with their boyfriend's family (Table 4.15). Similar to other situations, they had been unable to resolve emerging conflicts. Not only did their accommodation come to an end but it was also the end of a friendship. It was only then that they could see how problems had increased. They held their friend and her parents responsible for the break-up and any subsequent problems.

"...I should have never moved in with them. It was the biggest mistake I've ever made because of the way I was treated and the way it turned out. (I left) because they (other friends) were both saying to me you are being treated like shit, do something about it."
(Jo4)

None of them had been able to use the stay to plan for permanent housing because neither the private sector nor social housing was accessible. 5 moved to another form of temporary accommodation.

Staying with family temporarily

Stein and Carey (1986) said little about the nature of the move to the family home and about young people's experiences once there. In this study 5 women stayed with members of their family temporarily on 6 occasions. They had already lived in hostels, with friends or their own tenancy had failed. The average length of stay was 4 weeks with a median of 3 weeks. Parents and siblings are referred to here. There was no evidence that the young women were able to stay with a member of the wider family.

Most had maintained some contact whilst in care or had recently established contact. This opened up the possibility of moving to stay with either or both parents.

"Your mum is there really to tell your problems...She knows me better virtually than anybody."
(Kate3)

"Tell you what I've done in the last 6 months, made up with my mum and dad. I've spent Christmas there, all over Christmas. I brought my sister a present down and my dad opened the door and there I stood. Hadn't seen me for 2 years, something like that. He invited me in for a coffee, he's forgiven me for burgling the house...He let me back in the house. Even left me on my own in there."

(Amy2)

They had not given any indication at an earlier interview that they had the option of moving back home. However, having established a relationship with their family, they made contact in crisis. One of the reasons for moving home was violence from a partner or a complete relationship breakdown in the previous accommodation.

"He came round one night and put all the windows through. So they (B&B) asked me to leave, which is fair enough cause there are a lot of pregnant girls in there and they don't want that hassle round them...I phoned up my Dad and my Dad came and got me."

(Amy3)

In some cases parents proposed that the young women returned home

"Then because it's only down the road from my mum, my mum says 'well you're down here most of the time, so you might as well move in.'"

(Kate3)

Relationships with parents and siblings continued to be difficult.

"Stupid things; having a bath at a certain time, just pathetic things... and they mull things over until it becomes a massive thing. It gets to the stage where the dishes have sat there for thirty seconds and they've gone off their heads. They like things to be done immediately, so I do it now for a quiet life but I still get shit on no matter what I do."

(Jo3)

"We argue but I'd always be there for her (sister) and she'd always be there fore me."
(Amy1)

There was also the issue of being treated like a child and losing the freedom of the previous accommodation arrangements.

"While I've been living at the flat I've been doing what I want completely whereas when you live at home you've got to think of other people...I think I've changed a lot and they don't seem to realise that I've changed... "
(Jo3)

They appreciated help and the comfort of living at home.

"My mum's been helping me a lot actually. She lets me stay there. When I have no food right she helps me there. I went down there today, to feed me. I just help myself. Mum says she doesn't mind."
(Kim2)

"I feel like the lodger. In a way it has a few little comforts, like your dinner is cooked for you when you get in from work and your clothes are washed for you when you get in from work...but other than that it's difficult."
(Jo3)

The reasons for leaving home were varied. Half the stays ended in a relationship breakdown and those young women moved into other forms of temporary arrangements.

"Since I was out of foster care I couldn't get back into family life. I wanted to go out more often and I just took it for granted that my mum would have ...(baby). I think I was a bit insecure. It didn't work out..."
(Kate3)

Similarly to staying with friends, their stay at home had not enabled them to plan for permanent housing and did not prevent future homelessness. In one case a young woman was sexually assaulted by a parent and this relationship ended. The damage of renewed conflict ended contact permanently in one other case.

"I don't see her, I don't want to see her. I'm fed up seeing her. Why should I go and see her. I didn't feel right with her, I never feel right going round there... she (sister) goes round with her boyfriend and sometimes we go out in a foursome but we always end up arguing...I don't have much to do with them. I keep myself to myself."

(Kim3)

Those whose temporary stay came to a natural end rather than a breakdown left on a positive note. They were able to stay in future.

" I will come and stay here after I've first had it and after about a week or so then I'll go home."

(Amy3)

"It's got better within the last month. I don't know why, maybe a lot of it is because I got away from (friend). I've settled down and they are happy that I'm with somebody that they like and treats me properly. I've changed as well. I'm not so temperamental."

(Jo4)

Staying with boyfriends temporarily

Once homeless 5 women stayed with their partner temporarily after they were evicted from a hostel or fell out with friends and family. They only stayed for a few weeks. None of the moves were planned. They experienced harassment and domestic violence whilst staying with their partner.

3 women had known their partner for only a few weeks and moved in with him to avoid sleeping rough.

"I was of no fixed abode. I stayed with P and his friends. It was a right dump. They had dinner and they left it a week or 2 weeks to be washed. It was disgusting, a mouldy kitchen."

(Kim4)

They could not foresee any problems with the relationship although it had only been strong for a few weeks.

"I want to stay forever, well not forever but...I don't want to leave. In a year or so. He's brilliant. He is lovely. He treats me wonderfully. I've never been treated so brilliant by anyone in my life. Nothing (is difficult). Not at the moment anyway."

(Jo4)

The young women were harassed by others while staying with boyfriends and remained because they did not want to sleep on the streets.

"It's a doss-hole. It's dirty and horrible. He's a muck. No, I can't stand the site of him. He thinks that every girl that stays there should sleep with him and cause some won't he gets vexed...He tries (to sleep with me), that's why we don't get on because he thinks I'll go with him and I won't... No I won't stay in the house on my own with him. When there is none else in the house, then I go out...(I worry) about who I'm gonna find sitting on the sofa when I get in. There's just different people going in and out of there...I can't like say, cause if it weren't for him I'll be living on the street...

(Amy2)

4 out of 5 left because of domestic violence.

" I went out with him for 3 days and I got my own bedsit then across the landing from him. I told him after 3 days I just wanted to be friends with him. There was no lock on the door.

And when I was sleep at night, he'd come into my bedroom and try it on me and I didn't want it. I told my auntie and my nan got me out of there...He used to follow me around town and everything."

(Ruby4)

The difficulties of being homeless

All of the 14 young women stated they had experienced difficulties whilst being homeless. The findings of, for example, O'Mahony (1988), of having to find somewhere to live, feeling anxious and not having money were reproduced here. There was a stronger emphasis in the young women's accounts of the effect of homelessness on their emotional well-being. The amount of domestic violence, harassment and breakdown of relationships they had experienced was striking. None of them mentioned those experiences when describing the difficulties of homelessness. None of them mentioned drugs, prostitution, sleeping rough or getting into petty crime, which O'Mahony (1988) pointed to. This could have been because the sample here included only women, whereas most youth homelessness studies have examined the experience of men and rough sleepers in particular.

One of the young women's main concern was having nowhere to live, having to ask friends and the feeling of insecurity and anxiety which remained with them.

"Not knowing where you gonna be one minute to the next. It's horrible when you knock on somebody's door to see whether you can stay."

(Kate3)

"The feeling that you are getting nowhere and that your life's in a mess, worrying what was gonna happen next."

(Viv2)

Although they said they came close to sleeping rough none of them in fact had to. This was confirmed by other studies who found that young women were less likely to sleep rough (Dibblin, 1991, Anderson et al 1993).

"Not knowing where I'm gonna stay the next week. It's my fault, been there, done it and now I'm doing it again. I wouldn't have to but I've always found somewhere to sleep."
(Amy2)

"Moving has been difficult...what to do and too scared to sleep rough."
(Hannah2)

Some particularly mentioned financial problems when being homeless.

"But then finding that you've got nowhere to live is expensive, having to eat out and everything."
(Kate3)

One moved to a different town and found that she was being treated as nobody's responsibility, (see also Garnett 1992).

"L don't want to know cause I am from C. They say I'm C's responsibility. I am C's Social Services responsibility and not L's responsibility. (They say) there's no reason for me to leave C."
(Amy2)

Length of time homeless

The majority were homeless only once. 4 out of 10 experienced homelessness twice. The length of time was taken from the point at which they moved into independence.

Table 4.16

Length of time homeless	Number
Less than 3 months	4
4 - 6 months	3
7 - 12 months	4
More than 12 months	3
Total	14

The average length was 8 months with a median of 6.5 months. These figures referred to the young women's experience up to the age of 19 and were likely to increase as 4 were homeless at the last interview. It was not possible to compare these figures with the literature. Studies either did not give the length of time of homeless (for example Kirby, 1994a and Biehal 1995) or did not include those who had found accommodation by the definition of the sample (Anderson et al 1993).

Trying to get permanent housing

Nearly all of those living in temporary accommodation tried to find permanent accommodation but faced structural and personal difficulties. Those not in priority need under the Housing Act 1985 Part 3 were not housed by the council or housing associations. They had little knowledge of the homelessness legislation or the council house letting system operated by housing departments. They expected to be waiting a long time but some thought that they would be housed eventually. This was in fact unlikely and they continued to live in temporary housing for homeless people.

Ruby wanted to get a flat in the same block where a member of her family lived. She was not as yet registered with the housing department and had no knowledge of the letting system.

"I am hoping to get a flat on the top floor when one comes empty cause I need a bedroom of my own. ..There's supposed to come one through... "

(Ruby 3)

"My name is on the council list...You have to wait a long time for a council flat. You just have to wait until one comes up."

(Holly4)

The private sector was beyond what they could afford. 3 out of 14 tried to get accommodation through the private sector but found that rents, deposits and rent in advance were often beyond their income and above Housing Benefit payments.

"I am trying to get a job. Once I get a job, I might be all right...I've been looking in the paper for a room or something but it's the money. They want a deposit and I haven't got it. That's why I need a job. He is looking for a job as well and he wants a place so we're thinking of getting a place together."

(Kim2)

Table 4.17

Final placement (N=20)

Last known housing	Total Cohort	Formerly Homeless	Homeless at last interview
Tenancy	10	5	-
Private lodgings	1	1	-
Family	5	2	-
Friends	1	-	1
Boyfriend	1	-	1
Hostel/Dispersed hostel	2	-	2
Total	20	8	4

At the last interview the accommodation of 20 young women was known.

Out of the original group of 14 homeless young women, 4 remained homeless at the last interview because of the structural factors outlined above. One other young woman was homeless at the time of the third interview, temporarily staying in a B&B.

However I lost contact with her after this interview. The remaining 4 were staying in temporary accommodation and were unsure how long they would be able to stay. All were concerned that they'd have to move again in the near future. None had an allocated social worker by the last interview.

2 were of mixed heritage, but did not see themselves as such. They did not think that that they had experienced racism when looking for accommodation. However they may not have been aware of indirect discrimination.

Out of the remaining 9 young women who had been homeless it was known that 8 had moved into secure housing.

From homelessness into permanent housing

Given the lack of affordable housing in the private sector only those who were housed through the homelessness legislation or through their families gained permanent housing. There was an increase in permanent tenancies but it was smaller than the 59% reported by Biehal et al (1995). It wasn't possible to relate the process of finding permanent housing to homelessness or leaving care studies because neither examined this experience in detail.

Housing Act 1985 Part III

5 were housed as homeless under the Housing Act 1985 because they were deemed to be in priority need. 3 of them were allocated tenancies after having a child. They were found not to be intentionally homeless which meant that previous accommodation ended for reasons beyond their control.

"But then when I got pregnant... Housing gave me a B&B for pregnant girls...I told them (housing department) I had nowhere else to go ... and I wanted a flat as soon as possible. That's how I got my flat so quick. My dad paid the rent arrears."

(Amy3)

In contrast to the findings of Lupton (1985), those who had to be housed in a B&B, thought that the accommodation was of a reasonable standard and they said that they did not mind as it was only a temporary arrangement. All of them were housed in tenancies before the birth of their child and this could have accounted for their positive views of B&B establishments (Miller 1990).

2 members held tenancies for the third time and were only given accommodation because they were in priority need. In both cases the young women had given up their previous tenancies due to harassment, domestic violence and rent arrears. This necessitated a number of moves before they were eventually housed. They felt that this tenancy would be treated differently, especially as they were now responsible for a child.

"Other friends don't come here cause all the friends I've got are thieves. They are people I've been arrested with, you know. I don't see them anymore... I don't know if I could say no so I don't take the risk...I don't get bored now. I don't get time now between the bottles and everything."

(Amy3,4)

One young woman was housed by the local authority after being classed as vulnerable and therefore in priority need. She was the only single homeless young woman to be housed under this part of the Housing Act. The fifth woman was housed with her partner after they had stayed with his family in overcrowded conditions.

Family contact

2 young women moved to live with their parents. In one case she had been living with her family for over a year. She did not feel that this was a positive choice but had nowhere else to go. She said that she had been abused in the past and did not feel safe at home. In the other case the young woman moved home with her child. Both moved home in crisis because they had no other option available. There was no pressure to move from the family in the near future.

"He has funny moods and that and he hit me...only once. (I went to my parents and said) 'I'm moving in' and they said 'all right'."
(Linda3)

"Why?, cause there was nowhere else to go. That was the only option cause they wouldn't give me a flat...I felt like jumping off the first train."
(Hannah2)

Successful access to the private rented sector

One young woman moved to lodgings which had been organised through a local voluntary organisation. She found lodgings because the landlords did not ask for a deposit or rent in advance and accepted the amount of money offered by Housing Benefit. She was renting a room only because she could not afford self contained housing. None of the women in this study successfully held a permanent tenancy in the private rented sector.

I lost contact with one young woman who had been homeless but who was able to lodge with the daughter of former foster parents. After the second interview was completed she moved to Wales and I could not trace her.

Children Act 1989 Section 20, 24 and 27

Section 20, 24 and 27 of the Children Act had considerable publicity over the past 6 years as local authorities have a power to accommodate homeless care leavers up to the age of 21. McCluskey (1993) pointed to the ways in which local authorities have been failing in their duties towards homeless care leavers. Centrepont reported that 37% of London authorities did not have enough accommodation to meet the needs of care leavers, (Strathdee, 1993 p.20).

It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that none of the women in this study were housed by the local authority under these sections of the Children Act. If the local authorities had acted within the powers of the legislation then the number of times the sample had to move might have been reduced.

Planned move with a partner or friends

None of the women in this study planned a move with a partner to live together. Neither did they plan to share a house with friends in the private sector. Jones (1995) found that young people shared accommodation with friends when first leaving home or living at university. This applied usually to those in work or attending a course. As care leavers did not move into independence for either of those reasons and were likely to be unemployed the opportunities for sharing were already reduced. It is also possible that there is a link between weak friendship networks and the lack of opportunity to share accommodation with friends.

To conclude, the young women defined becoming an adult as having to be responsible for themselves, their housing and their actions as well as living independently. This definition confirmed the earlier findings by Hutson and Jenkins (1989).

There were differences in the way the sample managed the transition to independent housing. There were 2 groups within the cohort: - those who had difficulties in the transition to independent housing and became homeless, and those who managed the transition well and did not become homeless. Furthermore, there were 2 routes into homelessness: those whose first independent accommodation was temporary and defined as constituting homelessness and those who were evicted from permanent housing or had to leave secure housing.

There was little available literature on how care leavers managed to maintain housing. This study found that those who maintained tenancies moved into independence later and in a planned way. They were also able to consider the consequences of their actions and had had experience of making compromises in foster care to remain in the foster placement. They also received support from either their families or a partner. Where tenancies were at risk the young women would need support in helping to negotiate rent arrears. Despite difficulties none of them wanted to give up their tenancy because they valued the security and independence it gave them.

The earlier literature had suggested that housing policy and the effect of the instability in care contributed to homelessness among care leavers. This analysis found that the combination of a disorganised early move into independence followed by a lack of access to housing and poor personal skills and support meant that once homeless all the young women moved frequently in crisis and without a clear plan. In addition they experienced harassment, domestic violence and frequent relationship breakdown which contributed to frequent movement. The young women commented on the detrimental impact of homelessness on their emotional well-being. Finally, the majority of homeless young women found permanent housing through the Housing Act 1985 Part III and the support of their families. A small minority remained homeless. It was unclear how those who had been homeless would maintain their housing and whether those who were homeless at the end of the study would remain so for the foreseeable future.

The findings of this study highlight the need for legislation to ensure that care leavers have access to secure and supported housing to prevent homelessness. Furthermore, the policy of social services departments to withdraw financial subsidy unplanned needs investigating to prevent the loss of accommodation in the private sector. Finally, the experience of the cohort demonstrated the need for a range of accommodation to take account of the different levels of support required.

Hutson and Liddiard (1994) have highlighted the link between youth homelessness and unemployment, the following section examines the cohort's transition to employment, training and education.

Section 5: Transition to Employment and Managing an Independent Income

Introduction

This section examines how the transition to employment and managing an independent income was experienced by the sample. Reference is also made to the impact of social policies, support systems and the young women's own skills.

Education

Jackson (1987) and more recently Biehal et al (1992 p.20) pointed to the low educational achievements of young people in care. In addition, 46% of homeless care leavers using Centrepoint had no formal qualifications, (Strathdee and Johnson, 1994). This applied to only 18% of young people in the general population in a recent ESRC study (Banks et al 1990).

Table 5.1

Level of qualification	Number
No formal qualifications	15
Up to 3 GCSE	3
More than 3 GCSE	2
BTEC First	1
BTEC Advanced	1
City and Guilds	1
Don't Know	1
Total	24

15 out of 24 young women had no formal educational qualifications. The number entering further education (6) and higher education (1) were much smaller than in the general population, (Yates, 1995).

This study did not focus in detail on the educational experience of the cohort until the age of 16. Thus, there was no data on the numbers of schools the sample experienced. However, young women spoke of only a few changes of school as most were placed in foster placements in their home town. At least 8 out of 24 had been truanting and not attended school on a regular basis. 2 had been placed in specialist small group programmes. 4 with learning difficulties had attended special educational provision.

Further Education

Young people are increasingly remaining in education after the age of 16 with 68% taking this choice (Yates, 1995). In this study 6 out of 24 remained in education after the age of 16. The low number of young people in care in further education was also reported by Biehal et al (1992) who found that only 8.5% of young people remained in education and Garnett (1992) with 20%. The 6 women followed GCSE and A level courses, a BTEC Fist Diploma and a pathway course for people with learning difficulties. Only one entered higher education. She was hoping to become a psychologist after completing her current BA.

Training and Employment

Table 5.2

Employment status at first interview

Employment status at 1st interview	Number
Unemployed	9
Youth Training	6
Employed	1
Caring for own child	2
Further/Higher education	6
Total	24

At the time of the first interview, some 6 to 9 months after leaving school, 9 out of 24 were unemployed. Only one member of the group was working full time.

6 out of 24 were in youth training. The sample lived in a variety of accommodation.

Table 5.3

Employment status	Tenancy	Hostel/ Partner	Fostercare	Family	Lodgings	Total
Unemployed	2	4	2	-	1	9
Youth Training	-	2	3	-	1	6
Employed	-	-	1	-	-	1
Caring for own child	1	-	1	-	-	2
Education	-	-	4	2	-	6
Total	3	6*	11	2	2	24

*The one young woman staying with her partner was added to those in hostels as both forms of housing were temporary. The young woman living with her partner was unemployed.

Table 5.4

Career options up to the final interview

Career option	Number of young women	Number of episodes
Employment	7	10
Youth Training	12	17
Further/Higher education	6	7
Caring for own child	9	9
Unemployed	16	16**
Total	24*	59

*This table applied to the sample of 24 but more than one answer was possible. **The total number of unemployment episodes per individual was not counted.

This table demonstrates that the cohort experienced a number of training schemes, courses and employment episodes with frequent movement between different options. Once they had become a parent, they did not enter the employment or training market again, a point also made by Speak et al, (1995).

Youth Training

Under the training guarantee all young people leaving school at 16 were to be offered a youth training placement. In 1994 15% of all young people entered training schemes, (Yates, 1995). In this study 12 out of 24 had attended a youth training course at some stage between the age of 16 and 19. Barnardos (1989) argued that, in order to gain benefit, the young women had to take up a training placement and this could have accounted for the high proportion of training placements. Only one young woman completed her training with a qualification as a mechanic, but she was made redundant at the end of the course. Thus, none of the YT placements resulted in a full time job.

10 out of 12 young women had placements which lasted less than 12 months and the reasons varied from being sacked or leaving due to arguments. Only 3 had more than one YT placement. 13 out of 17 placements were in traditionally female areas of work like hairdressing (6), clerical work (6) and catering (1), all of which were low paid with a low status. Those findings were also reported by Marsh (1986). All women were paid on the basic training allowance of £35 for a young person aged 17. They were unsure whether there would be a full time job at the end of the placement and, therefore, there seemed little incentive to finish the training. Particularly in hairdressing and catering the women commented on long and unsocial hours. However, the main reason for leaving or being sacked were relationships with other employees or the employer and this was not referred to in the earlier literature, for example, Finn (1987).

"I didn't get on with the boss. He told me to shampoo all the time. I don't mind shampooing ...but when he snaps at you 'do it', you have to jump and I hate that. Where as where I'm now he does it in a friendly way...he's pushing me a bit at the moment because he says I need to get my speed up...I mean if you think about it I'm in my first year."

(Ann2)

The experience of not liking the work and not feeling any benefit was also expressed, a point also made by Finn (1987) in the literature review.

"It's really boring stuff, typing ..it's sort of YT. It's really boring. I'm going to speak to the person in charge if they've got something more interesting. I can't sit in an office all the time...I'm not doing anything active enough. I do typing, computer, faxing, telephone and general office boring stuff. "

(Janice3)

It seemed that if the young women did not get on with their employer they would change placement in order to complete their training. One young woman had 4 hairdressing placements in those 18 months and in fact a year after this study completed her training having had another 2 changes.

"I'm like a dogs body, book keeping, serving customers, post, making coffee, showing customers upstairs...Like I do one thing and this girl was putting pressure on me...It was doing my head in... She says if she can't find me another one, she'll have to take me off the scheme...I'm worried about loosing this... I'm sick and tired of staying in all day. I want a job, I have to get out."

(Kim3)

Once they had left training, many became unemployed even though this meant living on suspended benefit. None of them said that they left a scheme because of poor pay or because they had to find a full time job to afford their accommodation.

Employment

Finding employment was increasingly difficult for young people with poor educational achievements. Only 8% of young people entered full time work after leaving school in 1994. 17% of all young people aged 16 - 24 were in full time employment in 1996 (British Youth Council, 1996). This study also found that few young women were employed. There were 7 women with a total of 10 jobs between them. Their jobs were in traditional female areas with very low pay. 3 jobs were in catering, 2 in factory work, 2 clerical, 1 cleaning, 1 nursery and 1 nursing job. Bender (1997) reported that wages for young people were continually low with an average rate per hour of £2.79.

Apart from one woman, who earned over £100 for a period of time, all others earned between £40 and £80 per week. Often wages fluctuated depending on shift work or piece rate. This made budgeting very difficult and led to potential debts and rent arrears.

"My job is on the line cause I can't do it. I know it's only a factory job and it's supposed to be the easiest job of all but. I just ain't cut out for it...I haven't got the speed or anything...I hate it. The money, working hard for nothing...In a bad week I get fifty quid. In a good one about ninety. I've got debts. The holiday money is not enough. so I have to work (during the holiday)."

(Charlie3)

These were not jobs the group enjoyed doing. It was either the only job they could find, although low paid, or they stayed because it was more money than YT.

"I hate it because I have to sit down in front of a computer all day and not being able to move and get a mouthful if you do. You get bastards on the other end of the phone...I've got to stay for the time being. I don't want to but I haven't got any choice...£20 a week dole. I couldn't manage on that."

(Jo4)

8 out of 10 jobs lasted for less than 3 months, however this included 3 women still holding jobs at the fourth interview and these may have continued. There were differences to the findings of the earlier literature review. Those women who were living independently and whose accommodation depended on them working, found and maintained jobs. If jobs were based on shift work or piecework then this led to debts. Most lost their job because they didn't get on with their line manager, a point not referred to in the literature, for example, Marsh (1986).

"Me and my boss we had a personality clash. He sacked me."

(Jo4)

"I loved the work but I was always getting stabbed in the back by everybody. Sometimes I was totally fed up with life...(they) said sorry you lost your job...I said 'me, leaving?', oh well then. I did."
(Mary3)

Unemployment

Stein and Carey (1986) had reported the high level of unemployment among care leavers. 16 out of 24 had been unemployed at some time. Unemployment among young people in general continues to be high with 19.5% registered in 1995, (TUC, 1996). Yet those figures were substantially lower than those given for care leavers, (Biehal et al 1995 and Kirby, 1994a). In this study unemployment had not been continual. Many experienced YT or full time work, a small number were caring for a child and others had gone into further education. Nonetheless, periods of unemployment and financial hardship had become a reality for many.

Table 5.5

Unemployment	No moves	1 - 3 moves	More than 4 moves	Total
Less than 3 months	2	3	1	6
more than 4 months	1	4	5	10
Total	3	7	6	16

Those who moved frequently in independence were no more likely to be unemployed for longer than those with few moves (p>0.05).

Table 5.6
 Accommodation when unemployed

Accommodation	Unemployment
Hostel	6
Tenancy	6
Foster care	1
Family	2
Lodgings	1
Total	16

Those living in hostels did not link type of accommodation to unemployment. Others living in more secure forms of accommodation did not relate unemployment to housing. One young woman linked unemployment clearly to having no permanent address but she was in the minority.

"No one can help me find work cause I haven't got a fixed abode. I can't fill in application forms with no fixed abode, can I. I haven't got an address. There's no point looking for a job cause no one is gonna give me one. I've just gotta wait."
 (Amy2)

Some tried to find work though they had no experience in the areas they were applying. They believed that the employment market was competitive with few opportunities for them.

"I would do anything. I've applied for loads of jobs today and yesterday, part time cleaning, part time sales assistant, full time packer. It is difficult at the moment."
 (Kim3)

"I look in the papers but there's not a lot going."
 (Mary4)

Those who had been unemployed for over 6 months felt upset and despondent at not finding work. They believed that there was no job that they could do. At this stage levels of self esteem were affected. Given that they had little educational success, the lack of employment could have further undermined their self confidence and self esteem.

"There's no point looking. I know there isn't anything I can do."
(Holly3)

"I feel like a piece of shit, everybody else is working."
(Jo2)

Table 5.7

Employment status at final interview

Employment status at final interview	Number
Unemployed	7
Youth Training	1
Employed	3
Caring for own child	7
School/Higher education	2
Total*	20

*The economic status of 20 women was known at the final interview

Compared to young women aged 18 in the general population, of whom 25.4% were not in work or training, (Bender, 1997), my sample were more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be caring for a child. 14 out of 20 were unemployed or caring for their child by the final completed interview.

Table 5.8

Employment status	Tenancy	Lodgings	Family	Temporary housing	Total
Unemployed	4	-	1	2	8
Training	-	-	1	-	1
Employed	-	1	1	2	3
Caring for own child	5	-	1	-	6
Education	1	-	1	-	2
Total	10	1	5	4	20

*Temporary housing included 2 women in hostels who were unemployed, 1 staying with a friend and 1 with a boyfriend, both of whom were employed.

There was no particular link between employment and living in temporary accommodation or holding a tenancy. The housing and employment situation of the sample was varied. Given the high levels of unemployment, without significant help and encouragement it seemed unlikely that many of them would find work or appropriate training. It was inevitable that the young women's poor employment situation would have had an effect on their income and their ability to make ends meet.

Managing an independent income

Table 5.9

Income at first interview

Income at 1st interview	Number
State benefit	7
Wages	2
Social Services allowance	9
Youth training allowance	5
No income	1
Total	24

At the time of the first interview 9 out of 24 young women were financially supported by Social Services because they were living in foster care. Stein and Carey (1986) had highlighted the level of benefit dependency among care leavers. At the age of 17, 7 young women living independently already relied on state benefits. Only 2 out of 24 had a higher income than benefit level through their wages.

Table 5.10

Income after 18 months	Number
State benefit	13
Wages	3
Student grant	1
Pocket money from mother	1
No income	2
Total	20*

*This table only includes those where the final interview was fully or partly completed.

The numbers relying on state benefit had increased to 13 out of 20. Only 3 had a higher income through wages. However, due to their low wage level they would have been entitled to claim housing benefit if they had lived independently. All 7, who were caring for a child, depended on state benefit or had no income. This was comparable to a study by Speak et al (1995) who found that young single mothers relied primarily on benefit. The 2 women with no income, relied on their partner and had rent arrears. Rather than claim benefit they wanted to leave their accommodation.

Lack of money and debts

Barnardos (1989) had suggested that benefit dependency could lead to debts and financial hardship. This was found here. A total of 6 women had their benefit suspended under new Income Support rules resulting in them having to live on about £20 a week. This led to financial hardship and debts.

As the DSS considered she had lost her job because of her own fault, Kim's benefit was reduced by 40%.

"I only get £42 a fortnight. I have to pay £12 rent that leaves £15 a week to live on. The money is gone already. I've got nothing to eat and can't do anything about it...If you need some help (hostel) they don't give you any. When I said today I have no food, they said 'go to your foster parents house'. But I can't go there all the time."

(Kim2)

The sample predominantly spent their income on essential items, firstly paying for rent, food, bills and children's items. Living on a very low income meant that, apart from 2, all said that they ran out of money regularly and 9 out of 20 went without food.

"It's very hard. I've got nothing left to budget. I pay rent and food first. I try to put some aside for this and that. But it's not that easy. You can guarantee that you run out by Monday, Tuesday, the money comes Friday. I don't eat much anyway and I don't eat properly at the moment. Sometimes I borrow off the girls here but I don't like that cause it leaves me short the next time. I don't go out, no fags."

(Kim1-3)

Those living in tenancies and temporary accommodation found managing on a low income very difficult. For them running out of money resulted in debts, mainly with electricity, water and gas companies but also with the local council for community charge bills. Those living in hostels had rent arrears.

"I was threatened with eviction when I was behind with my rent. I was told I had 2 weeks or I was out. So I'm paying it off now. I owed £71...I got behind from the time when I was at the nursing home and I wasn't staying here. I didn't come in to pay rent. I had a loan from the Social. I bought clothes and most off my rent off. The loan was £115. They are taking it out every week."

(Kim3)

"All I've had is £23.52 a week and that's when it does come through. And it hardly ever comes through. It's been totally doing my head in. Cause one week I've got money and for the next 4 I haven't. I run out within 3 days. When I haven't got fags I go mental. I run out of food every week. I've got none now. She (mum) doesn't want to give me money, but she does...I already have rent arrears."

(Jo3)

Those living in tenancies had debts but in general had managed to hold on to their tenancies. 6 received extensive help from family members in terms of paying off debts and getting food. Without this help it is unlikely that tenancies would have been maintained.

"I haven't paid my water, haven't paid my gas bill, I only pay my electric and that's because of the meter....I run out of money all the time because the end of the day I'm paying out more than I'm earning (YT)...I don't go out at all...I go and see my mum. ..She buys me cigarettes now and then. She always gives me food."

(Jaz3)

"I get £20 a week. I'm not eating much. I run out every fortnight. I go without food. My boyfriend cooks me meals. I make do with what I've got. I try not to borrow but I have debts with the bank."

(Mary4)

Living with debts also meant that they felt that they were failing to manage their income effectively and this seemed to affect their self esteem and self confidence.

"My financial situation worries me and gets me down. At times I get upset and cry...everything piles up on top of me."

(Charlie3)

"I worry about coping with bills."

(Kelly4)

To summarise, the earlier literature review argued that care leavers' transition to employment and managing an independent income was difficult because of low educational achievements, unemployment and the dependency on social security benefits. This picture was supported here. The educational qualifications of the sample were well below the national average. Some young women spoke of truanting and a minority had special educational needs. All young women found it difficult to find employment or good quality training because of their low educational achievements. Only a small number entered further education and only two completed a course. The majority moved in and out of unemployment, employment and training schemes. Only one young woman completed a training scheme and none of the training schemes led to employment. Employment was found predominantly in factory work, hairdressing and social care with low wage levels.

Nearly all were living on a low income, with the majority living on state benefit levels. This led to debts and financial hardship. It also undermined their ability to manage their money as the money wasn't enough to cover bills and living expenses. Some had rent arrears and debts potentially putting accommodation at risk.

None of the young women related unemployment to living in temporary accommodation and there was no link between moving frequently and unemployment. Although the sample did not explicitly recognise the link between being homeless and unemployment, their low income meant that all those in temporary could not afford to rent accommodation in the private sector or buy a property and end their homelessness.

None of the cohort spoke of extensive help in finding training or employment and managing their income. Further involvement of the Careers Service will be required so that care leavers are better informed about employment options. Training schemes need to consider the special needs of care leavers so that this group can benefit from gaining skills enabling them to find employment.

A number of young women were not seeking employment because they were caring for a child and, therefore, relied on benefit for their income. Their experience is examined in the following section.

Section 6: Becoming a Parent

This part of the research study looks at parenthood, and its relationship to housing

Young single parents and housing

During 1993 and 1994 there was renewed political interest in teenage parenthood with particular emphasis on housing. Sir George Young, the former Minister for Housing, outlined the attack on the housing rights of young mothers' firstly at the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool in October 1993.

"How do we explain to the young couple who want to wait for a home before they start a family that they cannot be re-housed ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned, child?"

However, the National Federation of Housing Associations argued that only 1.7% of CORE lettings in 1992/93 went to single parents under the age of 20 (HA Weekly, 15.10.1993).

"This is no evidence of queue jumping ahead of those in need," said NFHA Director Jim Coulter, (HA Weekly 15.10.1993).

A survey by the Institute of Housing found that only between 2% and 14% of acceptances of homeless applicants were young single mothers whilst single parent families made up a total of 41% of acceptances.

"...It is possible that some single women get pregnant in order to get council housing but we have no evidence that they do. There are comparatively few homeless single women who had not had children but who were accepted for re-housing because they were pregnant and most of them because they had to leave home against their wishes. Nobody seems to comment on the possibility that childless couples decide to have children earlier in order to get council housing."

(The Institute of Housing, October 1993).

Despite these strong statements from housing professionals the government introduced the Housing Act 1996 in January 1997, with wide ranging changes to the homelessness legislation, by offering only temporary rather than permanent accommodation to homeless families and allocating social housing through a waiting list without immediate priority for homelessness. In future, pregnant women could find that they would only be offered temporary rather than permanent housing. This could result in further movement and instability until permanent housing was finally found.

Pregnancy

Young women leaving care become parents at a much earlier age than the majority of women. The average age for a first pregnancy was 27 years in 1993 (Social Trend, 1994). Less than 10% of the female population had become a parent by the age of 19 in 1991 (Burghes and Brown, 1995), whilst one third of young women leaving care had become parents 2 years after moving into independence (Stein and Carey, 1986).

There were a total of 16 pregnancies among 12 women by the final interview. 8 out of 12 were over the age of 17 when they were pregnant for the first time, 2 were 15 and 2 were 16 years old. The significant number of pregnancies corresponded to findings of earlier studies, (Garnett, 1992 14% p.66 and Biehal et al, 1992). 4 members of the cohort group had experienced 2 pregnancies by the final interview. 9 women became parents and 1 of them had 2 children. There were 2 miscarriages and 1 still birth. 1 out of 12 had a termination. 11 out of 16 pregnancies were unplanned, suggesting support for the evidence of other studies into teenage parenthood (Biehal et al, 1995 p. 132; Phoenix, 1991).

5 women planned a pregnancy. Wallace (1987) suggested that the need for adult status may contribute towards women wanting to become parents. This was not the reason given by the group here.

Table 6.1

Economic situation at pregnancy

Economic status	Planned pregnancy	Unplanned Pregnancy	Total
Employed/YT	-	3	3
Unemployed/	4	4	8
Caring for child			
In education	1	4	5
Total	5	11	16

The economic situation of the group varied with a mixture of those in employment, unemployment, at school and in training. 6 pregnancies happened when the women were unemployed and there was an even split between those who planned to have a baby and those who did not. These figures did not give a clear picture as to why they wanted to have a baby.

Table 6.2

Accommodation at pregnancy

Accommodation	Planned pregnancy	Unplanned Pregnancy	Total
Tenancy	3	3	6
Foster	2	5	7
care/Family			
Hostel/Friends	-	3	3
Total	5	11	16

There was no significant relationship between living in foster care and wanting a baby ($p>0.05$). 3 out of 5 pregnancies were planned when the young women were holding a tenancy. Both lived with their mothers and foster carers and wanted a baby to love, to look after and somebody who loved them. They related this to their own experience of lack of love and care.

"I planned it. I wanted somebody to love, something secure. Somebody who loved me. I didn't have that from my family or any foster family."
(Pat4)

These 5 did not foresee any difficulties at that time. In one case being a mother was seen to bring greater autonomy and control, a point also made by Wallace (1987).

"I was happy. It will be easy...I won't have anybody telling me what to do."
(Nancy4)

The young woman living with her mother was unemployed and the other, living with foster carers, was at school.

Becoming a parent

There were a total of 10 children born to 9 women by the final interview. The women became mothers earlier than women in the average population. In 1993 1 in 32 women under the age of 20 gave birth (British Youth Council, 1996) compared to 9 out of 24 in this study.

Table 6.3

Age at birth	Planned pregnancy	Unplanned Pregnancy	Total
16	1	1	2
17	-	4	4
18	1	3	4
Total*	2	8	10

*This table refers to the ten births because one young woman became a parent twice.

There was no significant relationship between age and having a baby unplanned (p>0.05).

Table 6.4

Accommodation of 9 mothers at final interview

Accommodation	Planned pregnancy	Unplanned Pregnancy	Total
Tenancy	1	6	7
Parents	-	1	1
B&B	-	1	1
Total	1	8	9

More women had moved into their own accommodation by the end of the study. 2 were choosing to stay with parents but were hoping to be housed by the local authority in future. Those who were housed permanently had waited between 4 and 31 months. Only 2 young women moved straight from foster care into a tenancy and in both cases this took 2 years and 2 1/2 years respectively.

The young women said they liked being parent because they were needed and somebody to whom they were close loved them. This related closely to their reasons for wanting a child and the initial impact on them.

"The thought that I am needed, that she relies on me. If anything goes wrong with her then she'll need me. No one can take that away from me. She's mine and nobody else's."
(Kate2)

"It's brilliant, it's pressurising, irritating, pleasurable. It's loads of things rolled into one."
(Pat3)

As their children became toddlers the demands on young mothers increased and the distinction between the demands and 'joys' of parenthood became more blurred.

"They just think of me as a young mother who's got herself pregnant. People are always a lot different to young mothers than what they are to others. People like undermine what I say especially in my family ... saying I'm a bit too young to understand or 'your grandmother knows best'."

(Kelly3)

What the young women enjoyed most, was seeing their child grow up and learn new things as well as the child's dependency on them.

"I've got him around and that. I like playing with him...he smiles."

(Linda4)

"There is something new every day...there is something different about them every day...Thinking about what they're gonna grow up like. What school they'll be going to, taking them to the park and watching (him) playing in the sand. Watching them when they're asleep because they are lovely when they are quiet."

(Pat2)

The issue of the new responsibilities of becoming a parent were apparent when the young women described the demands of being a parent. Initially, they commented about relishing the responsibility placed on them' but as the children became older, the responsibility of being a parent also meant pressure on them personally.

"It's been difficult fitting me and what I used to do in with her. I have to fit in with her and that's quite difficult. I have to be around all the time."

(Kate2)

"I didn't want (him) away from me but at the same time I couldn't sit there and nurse him like everybody else because I had suddenly lost all my freedom...I used to go down to my mum's and I would just say 'take him please, I've got to go out' and turn up 2 hours later."

(Pat2)

In addition, some were already aware of the lack of support they had.

"I suddenly realised there are so many things that I could do that I can't do. In a way it annoys me, other people have got their parents or their boyfriends and I have no substitute for that."

(Kelly2)

One child was of mixed heritage and was already facing racism.

"I hate it when people say 'isn't he white, yes it's not that bad'. You don't say to a white person 'oh, that (baby) looks more Italian'. People say 'oh, he's got whiter than I last saw him' which is really annoying....If he wanted to know about his culture that wouldn't bother me. I'd tell him."

(Kelly2)

The earlier literature review had suggested that making the transition to independent living, managing money and becoming a parent could place demands on care leavers which they might find difficult to meet. Managing an independent income and being a parent was difficult because of the sample's low income. Nearly all the young women commented that they had very little money after they had bought things for the baby and paid for electricity and food. Thus, the sample related structural factors, such as low benefit levels to their difficulties, rather than dealing with a number of issues at the same time. The women prioritised the child, rent, electricity and food but as all of them were receiving Income Support there was no money left. Apart from one woman all said that they ran out of money.

"It's difficult cause his wages are monthly and he's terrible with money. I don't have any money for myself."

(Kate2)

4 women were living in foster placements when their children were born. Neither department had a policy on how much money young women should receive.

One woman received only pocket money and clothing allowance but had to buy nappies and clothes for the baby. This left her short of money for herself.

"You never have any money and you never have any time to yourself. You can't just go mad on a shopping spree in the day...I was getting 19 pounds a week to buy everything for when he arrived which was really bad."

(Pat2)

As children grew up the issue of money became more difficult especially as women moved into independent accommodation.

"The money that was coming in wasn't really enough to cover everything. I was getting shopping, getting enough food for me and the kids but all the rest of the money went on raves and not at all on bills..."

(Pat4)

Support from partner's and own family

Stein and Carey (1986) had suggested that the care leavers might not have access to family support in managing the transition to becoming a parent. The level of support listed by the young mothers was greater than anticipated. All had been in a stable relationship when they had found that they were pregnant. Apart from one, all felt supported during the first 6 months of being a parent. There had been changes in the relationships with parents and partners.

Parents had been mentioned as an important source of support during the pregnancy. After the initial excitement over the pregnancy, the earlier problems in the relationships with parents became more apparent. However, the relationships changed throughout the period of research. 2 experienced serious problems with their mothers or both parents. In one case the argument was about the choice of partner, in the other case the young woman did not trust the stepfather who had sexually assaulted her.

"We've fallen out. He (stepfather) wanted to be a proper granddad and really that isn't on. I would be worried about her."

(Kate2)

6 out of 9 had support from mothers and/or fathers in the form of money, decorating and child care. In a further case a grandmother was the main source of support. The attention focused on the young women's feelings about their parents now that they had become parents themselves.

"I couldn't imagine having a really bad relationship with her. Not now."

(Kelly2)

Even when parents were supportive, the relationship was not necessarily easy as they remembered the reasons for being admitted to care and earlier conflicts.

"She helps with the children. I find it really difficult to talk to my mum...I mean she doesn't understand so I mean the lot of the time I put it to the back of my head and don't say anything."

(Pat2)

"I've got more problems than other people with their families. I can't just go to my family. I can't ask my dad for advice (they've had their children taken into care)."

(Kelly2)

Partners remained important although there were changes and signs of instability and pressure due to the birth of the baby. They did not list the incidents when partners provided practical help but the emotional support was important to 5 out of 9. A number of relationships ended and 6 out of 9 were single parents by the final interview.

There was no mention of social workers offering help and support, although in one case a worker had helped with applications to the housing department and money.

Social workers, as demonstrated below, were seen as officers of the department monitoring the group's ability to care for their children. Considering these young women were still entitled to after care, the role of the social worker was seen as a hindrance rather than help.

The impact of being a parent

Although the young women had not looked to motherhood to gain adult status, they said that being a parent had changed them and made them more responsible and grown up. This point was also made by Phoenix (1991) who found that motherhood was an opportunity for growth and development. The young women here demonstrated maturity in the decisions they made over housing, relationships, managing money and for some, having aspirations for the future.

"It's changed me completely. The way I think, the way I feel everything. I'm worried I'm not just gonna be seen as somebody's mother and what worries me is that I am missing out, that I'm gonna be a mother and that's all...I just feel a lot more responsible generally because I consider his colour...I have to consider him...I think what's best for him not just what's best for me and how are the Social Services going to look at it."
(Kelly2)

"It's just made me grow up and face my responsibilities and see things in a different way. Sort of realising that there is two sides to everything and not everything is good and I can't have my own way all the time... Sometimes I don't want to have to do that but you still have to face it, that you're not going to get everything you want, that you have to compromise."
(Pat2)

The women also said that the responsibility of caring for a child also led to increases in self confidence and self esteem, a point also made by Wallace, (1987).

"I've grown a lot more confident. I can do a lot of things myself now rather than rely on other people."

(Kate3)

There was also a recognition that becoming a parent was hard and the responsibility could get too much. In these cases Social Services became involved.

Social Services involvement

The earlier literature had not examined the issue of care leavers' children being admitted to care or placed on the At Risk Register. However, this was an issue for 3 out of 9 mothers. During the pregnancy the women had been worried about being monitored by Social Services. Initially, there were some concerns about the motivation of social worker's involvement. By the final interview, 1 child had been on the at risk register, 2 children were staying with grandmothers and 1 child was accommodated. This represented 4 out of 10 children where there had been substantial Social Services involvement.

In one case a child was briefly monitored after accusations of violence and alcoholism by parents against a young woman's partner. She later separated from him and returned to live with her parents. By this time the child was no longer on the Children at Risk register.

Given that the role of social workers was seen to monitor the women's ability to parent their child, they felt unsupported by them and the department.

"I thought everybody would be breathing down my throat, how I was looking after the baby and that. I think I have been careful with what I've done, like I thought I can't lose my temper cause I'm in care... I don't want him to grow up with Social Services. I know my mum thinks it's normal cause she had a social worker for so long, it's not normal."

(Kelly2)

The earlier literature review had argued that managing all 3 transitions of living independently, managing an independent income and becoming a parent could prove difficult. This was the case for 2 young mothers who were separated from their children for at least a few months. Both had been living independently.

" It's hard work from having so much freedom and all of a sudden you're totally responsible for another little thing. I wanted to go out more often and I took it for granted that mum would have her."

(Kate)

They were leaving their children with their mothers until they were forced to decide whether or not they wanted to work towards having their children live with them. There was evidence that both needed a period of time to enjoy themselves and escape their responsibilities. However, as this was not articulated earlier, it could not be planned for and the children were eventually accommodated or on the at risk register.

"So my mum gave us a choice, 'what do you want? Do you want to be free or do you want her?' 'I think people will understand if I have her you go out and do whatever you want'. So I did. At the moment I'm happy with where she (daughter is) and she's happy with it...The agreement is that when I get a house and settled I have her back but I want a contract written up saying that."

(Kate3)

In one case the child remained with her grandmother and I lost contact with the young woman. In the other case the young woman returned to her flat with her partner and both worked towards having the children live with them permanently.

To conclude, there was support for the findings of Stein and Carey (1986) and Garnett (1992) that the young women made the transition to parenthood at an earlier age than the general population as 9 out of 24 became parents by the age of 19. There was a suggestion by Wallace (1987) that young women might look for the status of motherhood if they had been unemployed. This point was not supported by the evidence here.

Most of the pregnancies were unplanned and those who planned to have a baby wanted a child 'to love and depend on them'. There was no evidence that they wanted to have a child to get housed by the local authority. The women who were housed because they had a child had to wait up to 2 ½ years for housing and others relied on parental support to gain housing.

The majority of mothers felt that becoming a parent had given them a greater than anticipated amount of responsibility. They believed that carrying this level of responsibility had made them more mature and they regarded themselves as adults. They also gained in self confidence and self esteem, a point also made by Phoenix (1991).

The women were also responsible for managing their own income and by the age of 19, 7 out of 9 were living independently. Most of them managed these transitions with the help of their parents and had become responsible for themselves and their child. A small minority struggled and children were admitted to care.

In looking at all three transitions Stein (1997) pointed to the need to examine how care leavers dealt with competing demands of managing housing, an independent income and becoming a parent at an earlier age than the majority of young people. He highlighted the relevance of focal theory to help understand the processes involved. Focal theory, developed by Coleman (1990), argues that 'at different ages particular sorts of relationship patterns come into focus, in the sense of being the most prominent, but that no pattern is specific to one age only', (Stein, 1997, p.56). Stein argued that entering a number of transitions at the same time could lead to difficulties if young people have to focus on a number of new roles and issues at the same time 'denying young people the psychological opportunity to focus on one issue at a time', (Stein, 1997, p.57).

Those who had become parents in this study commented on the structural difficulties in managing the transition to adulthood, such as living in temporary housing, on a low income and not having stable family support. Focal theory concentrates on psychological processes and fails to take account of structural factors.

Jones and Wallace (1992) acknowledge the importance of taking account of personal as well as structural factors when analysing young people's transition to adulthood. The authors advocate a life course approach which examines how young people's skills and abilities influence their opportunities in the housing and employment market. It is possible that in order to understand how care leavers manage the transition to adulthood, focal theory and a life course approach could both contribute to ensure that psychological as well as structural factors are taken account of. For the women in this study, the support of parents, partners and friends also influenced the way they managed the transition to adulthood.

Section 7: The role of support systems in the transition to adulthood

This chapter examines the role of support systems in enabling young women's transition to adulthood. There is a particular emphasis on the role which support played in assisting in the move into independence, managing an independent income and becoming a parent. The relationship with family members, partners and friends are analysed as they related to the nature of support offered.

The role of family support

Millham et al (1986) suggested that young people in care often had poor relationships with parents and that contact was frequently lost. There was a danger that parents might not have offered support after young people left care. With the exception of Biehal (1995) and Kirby (1994a) the leaving care literature has not examined the role of families in offering after care support in great depth, (Garnett, 1992, Broad, 1994, Save the Children, 1995). This study found that despite difficult family relationships 14 out of 24 young women received considerable support from either or both parents. There were a number of changes in the relationships with parents and the support was varied. Family members included parents, siblings and the extended network such as grandparents and uncles and aunts.

Table 7.1
Regular and continued contact with mothers or both parents after moving into independence

Contact after independence	No contact in care	occasional contact in care*	Regular contact in care	Total
No contact	6	4	-	10
Regular contact	2	1	11	14
Total	8	5	11	24

Those young women who had regular contact with either/or both parents in care were significantly more likely to maintain contact after moving into independence ($p<0.01$).

Lack of supportive relationships with mothers and mostly fathers

There were a total of 10 young women who either had no contact with either parent or where a recently established relationship had broken down again. Garnett (1992) and Kirby (1994a) found that contact with families was less likely if children had been in care for more than 5 years. This picture was also found here. 6 had not had any contact with mothers whilst in care and 4 had occasional contact, which usually meant that it was not organised through social workers and happened every few months or years.

Table 7.2

Contact after moving into independence	Sexually abused	Not abused	Total
No or occasional contact	7	3	10
Regular contact	5	9	14
Total	12	12	24

Having been sexually abused did not lead to less contact with parents ($p>0.05$). Anger about the relationship with their mothers was expressed when there had been no/or irregular contact for years.

"I used to pop over and see her but she just causes so much trouble for me. She's a compulsive liar. I am trying to find excuses for her like it's difficult for her...But I've been quite angry, hating her...I don't want to go over and see my mum...She's got no maternal instincts...She makes all these promises and never keeps any."

(Kelly3/4)

"She's never been there for me. I could never rely on her...It will never change. It'll be the same."

(Ann3/4)

The emergence of anger and hostility was found in other empirical studies, for example Briere (1984).

"The anger and hostility may be a primitive way victims try to protect themselves from future betrayal. The distrust and difficulty in intimacy is another form of protection."
(Wyatt and Powell(eds), 1988 p.75)

Other women were unlikely to trust mothers again after a recent breakdown in the relationship.

"I don't want to know no more. Calling me names like that...I don't think we really get on...She's a shit stirrer. She expects everybody to give her and not give anything back."
(Charlie4)

"I don't wanna see her cause if it wasn't for her I wouldn't be struggling now. My brother wouldn't be where he is (in foster care)...I'm still angry because she left me and I stuck here."
(Mo3)

The impression was given that the feelings of mistrust, anger and disappointment were running deep within their consciousness. The distress and anger about poor family relationships because of rejection and past abuse was also highlighted by Biehal et al (1995).

"Not surprisingly, these young people's feelings about their families were complex, full of conflicts and ambivalence ...and (they) were deeply distressed by this."
(Biehal et al, 1995 p. 87).

Although there was no contact with mothers and apart from one case fathers, the group had close relationships with another member of their family such as siblings (4), stepfather (1), grandmother (1) and father (1). 3 out of 10 did not have any contact with any member of their family. The conflict with their mothers also affected contact with siblings as they either sided with their mother or access to them was controlled.

The earlier literature review argued that the lack of family support could hinder the transition to adulthood because existing social policies were based on the notion of young people's dependency on their family. 2 out of 10 struggled to maintain accommodation and in a further case there was evidence of financial hardship. Given the small sample, this issue was not further explored and would need testing on a wider sample.

Supportive relationships with parent/s

There were 14 young women who either re-established a supportive relationship after moving into independence or who had maintained contact whilst in care and throughout the study. 12 out of 14 were admitted to care as teenagers and 11 had maintained contact. Biehal et al (1995) also found that contact with parents was good after leaving care if it had been maintained continually. This group described the overall relationship as positive. There were fewer incidents of conflict and it could be overcome.

"I couldn't go home (permanently) cause we argue... My mum is okay. She's come round to my way of thinking a bit. She doesn't say things behind my back...Now I listen to people. I take notice."

(Jaz4)

"I just don't get so hung up about things any more. I just think what the fuck. It's my life...I suppose it's me growing up."

(Jean4)

6 out of 14 had contact with both parents and for all 14 the relationship with mothers was closest.

"I love my mum so much it hurts. To be honest I don't feel any hate towards my mum at all. My mother's led a shit life...If anything happened to her I think it'll kill me...My dad I don't know. I get upset about him..."

(Jo1)

3 out of 14 had re-established relationships with parents after a period of no contact which varied between 3 years and 12 months. They had the closest relationships with either both parents or mothers. They felt that they had established trust and a new relationship as both sides had changed.

"They are important to me as they always bail me out... I get on better with my mum now. Things have changed...When I was in care and my parents didn't wanna know, I hated them...Now they are fantastic."
(Amy4)

The nature of family support after moving into independence

Table 7.3

The nature of help given by significant family member including mothers or both parents at any time since moving into independence

Help	Regular contact	No or occasional contact	Total
Financial, material and emotional help	12	3	15
No help	2	7	9
Total	14	10	24

*This table relates to all 24 young women who could give more than one answer.

Those who had contact with their parent/s were significantly more likely to receive help ($p<0.01$). Studies into the experience of homeless young people, for example, Jones (1995) and O'Mahony (1988) found that homeless young people received no parental help and support. This picture was also found here. Those young women who did not receive extensive financial help from their families either had no contact with their family or had a very poor or stressful relationship, a point also made by Biehal et al (1995). Neither Kirby (1994a) nor Garnett (1992) were able to comment on the issue of help and support given by families.

The support given by families was mainly financial help, child care, food and being able to stay overnight. Emotional support and advice was given in a small number of cases. Help was given mainly by mothers. This level of help was similar to the help offered to young people leaving home who did not experience family conflict (Jones, 1995). In 2 cases where there was no contact with mothers, fathers and grandmothers gave extensive help. Once help was given it was often in more than one way.

Transition to independent housing

Wallace (1987) had shown that parental support could enable young people to leave home and live independently. Jones (1995) qualified this by pointing out that parents were most likely to support young people leaving home if the reason for leaving was related to employment, training or education. In this study there was little evidence that family members were able to secure permanent independent accommodation for the young women. There was no evidence that families helped with homeless person's interviews, completing housing application forms, viewing properties or giving money for deposits and rent in advance. It is likely that they did not have the financial means for this and that young women did not involve them in the process of finding accommodation. During the 18 months of this study some relationships with parents broke down. This led to the loss of support from a parent. It did not lead to young people losing independent housing.

10 out of 24 stayed with their families. If disruption occurred, the women had to move. As the return home had not been planned for, nor was it based on good relationships, a breakdown was not surprising, a point also made by Biehal et al (1995).

Financial help to clear debts and help with money management

Jones (1995) found that in families where a father was working, over 60% of young people received financial help after leaving home. The author quoted a study by Pickvance and Pickvance (1994a and 1994b) who found that 28% of young people received financial help after leaving home and the average amount was £1,000. This sample received far smaller amounts of money.

"If I run out of money, usually go up to my mum's and she usually gives me some for cigarettes."

(Pat3)

" I'm not on the dole. I get nothing. Gran gives me pocket money. 10 pounds a week. I spend it, sometimes I save it. I buy cigarettes, I go out. Gran gives me more sometimes if I run out."

(Ruby4)

Table 7.4

Financial support by family members and maintaining tenancies

	Maintained tenancy	Did not maintain tenancy/tenancy at risk*	Total
Financial help	4	-	4
No financial help	2	5	7
Total	6	5	11

*Tenancy at risk was defined as having rent arrears and debts and being threatened with eviction.

Those who received financial support were no more likely to maintain tenancies than those who did not ($p>0.05$).

Financial help was either direct, by being able to borrow money or by being subsidised when they were living at home, a point also made by Wallace (1987). The total number of women receiving help at any one time was 16. Financial help to clear arrears was only given in exceptional circumstances. In this case the young woman had become a parent.

"I've got £400 rent arrears so the council won't move me but my dad is gonna pay them for me...and then I have to pay him back each week..."

(Amy4)

Help with goods and services

Many young women received help in kind, like food, having their washing done or help with repairs and decoration. This was also referred to by Hutson and Jenkins (1989). The help with food supported the young women's ability to manage their money and avoid debts.

"My gran buys me a lot. If I run out of fags she gives me 40. A lot of times when I go up to my gran's I have something to eat...cause I cannot cope on 35 pounds a week. No way.'
(Mo3)

"For practical things my dad helps, decorating."
(Kelly4)

Becoming a parent

Those women who had recently become parents received support with buying things for the baby, the new flat, if they had moved and baby-sitting.

"Mom's going to have a phone fitted for me for incoming calls only. At least I'm going to have a telly - she's going to buy me a telly...I see her nearly every day and she baby-sits so I can go out. I would go and see her if I needed help."
(Pat4)

"They help with the baby, take her out for a walk."
(Linda3)

Emotional support and advice

A small number of young women talked about emotional support from their parents. In 2 cases young women were staying temporarily with a parent after being harassed or broken into.

"The people who help me are my mum and dad. I have all the help that I need...Dad is very protective...They help with advice. "

(Amy4)

"I don't stay in the flat much. I stay at my mum's. I've got my family...As long as I have my family I'll be all right. I'll get a lot of help off my family."

(Jaz4)

Parents and mothers were important as a source of practical help. The young women did not feel they could necessarily talk to their parents or rely on emotional support when there were difficulties in looking after children or personal relationships. Those, who were in crisis due to rent arrears, did not feel that they could talk to their mothers at that time.

"I find it difficult to talk to my mum. I mean she doesn't understand...My mum has made life absolutely impossible for me... She gave me grief over the drugs."

(Pat4)

This could have been because they thought parent/s would be unsympathetic or because they did not want to admit difficulties in living independently. Jones (1995) added that young people who had left home found it difficult to admit that they were in need of help for fear of losing their independence.

The role of partners in the transition to adulthood

Stein and Carey (1986) briefly referred to the role of partners in providing accommodation. Overall, the support offered by partners has received comparatively little attention compared to parental support. In a detailed study of care leavers Biehal et al (1995) briefly mentioned the role of partners in the transition to independence. There was no detailed examination of the role of partners in Kirby (1994a) or Jones (1995). It was, therefore, difficult to compare the findings here with other studies into the experiences of young people leaving home.

Banks et al (1992) in a study of the 'Careers and Identities' of young people found that young women between 16 and 20 spent less time at home and were increasingly looking for a partner. Most of the sample in this study also spoke of the importance of partners. Yet, a partners' violence could threaten the young women's housing security.

Table 7.5
Relationship between Support by mothers/both parents and having a supportive partner at last completed interview

	Supportive partner	No supportive partner	Total
Strong support by mother/both parents	3	8	11
No support from mother/both parents	7	6	13
Total	10	14	24

Biehal et al (1995) found that partners were particularly important to those young people who did not have a close relationship with their families. This study found a tendency for those with poor parental support to be more likely to have a supportive partner, but the relationship was not significant.

Qualities valued in partners

The qualities valued in partners by the young women were 'nice personality', 'makes me laugh', 'treats me well', 'doesn't treat me like shit', 'kind'. In general women talked about the positives in their relationships early on when they started going out with somebody.

"He's a good laugh. He's not good looking. He's ugly. I don't care what anybody says. He's got a wicked personality and he's ever so nice to talk to and he's ever so kind. Gets me anything I want."
(Amy2)

There was little elaboration as to what was meant by 'nice personality'.

Not 'being treated like shit' seemed more important in their relationship, than help and support from partners. The majority of the young women spoke of partners. This picture compared to the evidence presented by Banks et al (1992) who found that 75% of women aged 18 had a partner. 7 out of 24 were involved in a long term relationship of more than 12 months.

Reasons for ending relationships

16 out of 24 changed partners. This was not unusual.

"Having a boyfriend was not necessarily a fixed status, once achieved, but rather something that young people moved into and out of."

(Banks et al 1992 p. 62).

However, there were differences among this group of young women compared with the study by Banks et al (1992). Often new relationships ended quickly and 5 out of 16 experienced violence.

"He nearly attacked me and in the end he sent me flying with a chair. He really hurt me as well. He used me for money as well."

(Mary3)

Others placed high expectations on a new relationship. It is possible that relationships ended when those expectations were not fulfilled. Griffin (1985) found that young women were wary of casual sexual relationships as they feared being regarded as a 'slag'. A small number of the young women spoke of frequent relationships but often did not go into detail. As this was not a major focus within the study, it was not possible to reach conclusions on this issue. The women were not always particularly upset at the break-up.

"If I hassle him and ring him all the time he just won't wanna know. So I leave him to it. If he doesn't ring it's his loss... I reckon he'll come back. I think he just needs time to think about things.

I'm not gonna run after him. If he's gonna come back, it's got to be his own decision..."
(Jaz4)

The nature of the support offered

Although partners offered some practical support with financial help and child care, they were most valued for the emotional support they offered.

Transition to independent housing

Leonard (1980) had pointed out that couples traditionally follow the pattern of going out together and then later planning to live together and maybe have children (Hutson and Jenkins, 1989). This cohort did not follow this traditional pattern. For a variety of reasons previous accommodation was lost. Sometimes this was because parents or foster carers did not approve of the relationship and the young woman left. Those who were expecting children or had children did not necessarily have their partner living with them in secure accommodation. In most cases the relationship had only recently begun before young women moved in. In all but one case the young woman left after the relationship broke down.

"We had an argument, he hit me. We'd not been getting on. He has funny moods. I don't know why. I was upset. He only hit me once. I don't wanna get together."
(Linda3)

"I got pregnant...when me and him had arguments he batters me... (And) I ain't gonna have kicking as well as."
(Amy3)

There was only one case of a joint tenancy after applying for social housing. One other couple was planning a move together at the fourth interview. None of the others found secure and permanent housing together. This was in part due to financial constraints and the lack of affordable housing.

"He doesn't get much money, not enough for us to live on. I don't get much. It all depends on whether I can get a better job or not. It all like depends on me. We can't do nothing until I get a better job."

(Charlie3)

Rather than access permanent housing through partners, they were more likely to lose housing due to their partner's behaviour.

"My ex found out, he's in prison now but his mates they know that I'm pregnant by a white guy and they have been really funny. They haven't spoke to me, they come round and cause a lot of trouble... I don't feel safe any more."

(Jaz4)

"He found out where I was living and smashed the whole place up...and the second flat."

(Amy2)

Like other young women of their age partners changed frequently and if the group had been living at home there would have been few expectations of them planning to move in with a partner at the age of 19, (Jones 1995). This could have explained why there were few plans to cohabit together.

Financial help

A number of women commented that their partner gave them money and helped with buying food. Usually they were small amounts of money which helped with day to day expenditure rather than large bills.

"He's been trying to help. Sometimes me brings food down."

(Kim2)

"I borrow off him. I owe him seventy quid at the moment. He ain't bothered as long as I pay him back."

(Charlie3)

Becoming a parent

Those who became parents faced new pressures in their relationship with partners.

Some partners left shortly after they found out that they were becoming a father.

In other cases there was help and support.

"He doesn't help much but it's just nice for him to be here. I don't have much time with him He did take the baby down to his mum's house for me so I could be on my own. He tries to help but then I've done it anyway."

(Kelly2)

"I talk things over with (him)...he spoils her, always holding her. If we go out he has to push the pushchair."

(Sally4)

Sometimes having a baby meant that young women wanted the relationship to work and become a family.

"I really want it to work. I really want to be a proper family. Every time when I think I can trust him or things are getting better or I think it might work out, it goes wrong....It's better than having nobody."

(Kelly3/4)

Emotional support and advice

7 out of 24 women had relationships with partners which lasted for longer than 12 months. They said that this made their partner more important in providing emotional support. The young women regularly commented on the importance of the relationship in terms of giving them somebody to depend on and who would support them. They recognised the pressure and dependency this created but this safety net was important in the absence of any other stable support.

"We get on well together. He's the best support...If I didn't have him, I'd just crumble...I want a home. I'd crack up if we split up. He's the only thing that keeps me going really."

It's the only thing that I look forward to...I know that puts a lot of pressure on him but he's all that I've got."

(Charlie3)

"He's always there ...he's dead understanding...I know it sounds horrible but I know that he's mine and nobody can take him away."

(Diane4)

In some cases stable relationships helped young women build their self esteem

"He's always trying to make me better..."

(Charlie3)

Although others in newer relationships wanted emotional support they were less likely to receive it. Those who had high expectations of new relationships also were afraid of losing their partner. This was likely to happen as the men were not always able to meet the expectations placed on them.

"I worry in case we break up, I suppose. It can go wrong, can't it."

(Charlie4)

"I worry that it will all go wrong like it usually does and I'll be on my own."

(Jo4)

Help from a partner's family

There was sometimes help from a partner's parents who became another family.

"His mum and dad are just like my mum and dad, like if I don't understand something they help me, like filling in forms and looking for a job..."

(Charlie3)

The role of friendship networks in the transition to adulthood

There was little reference to the role of friends in offering support to young people leaving care in, for example, Stein and Carey (1986). Biehal et al (1995) found that care leavers who had poor relationships with parents and partners also had few friends. Banks et al (1992) found that in addition to partners, same sex friends were particularly important for young women aged 16 to 20. In this study friends were important in providing a source of accommodation for young people. Some felt that being in care had undermined their ability to establish friendships.

Table 7.6

	Friendships	No close friendships	Total
Support from parent/s or partner	12	6	18
No support from parent/s or partner	3	3	6
Total	15	9	24

Those who had support from partner or family were significantly more likely to have close friends ($p<0.01$). There was a small group of 3 young women who did not have supportive relationships with partner or family, nor did they have friends. It is likely, they had difficulty in establishing close, supportive relationships.

The meaning of friendship

Comparatively little was known about young people's relationships with friends when they were in care. Cliffe and Berridge (1991, p.122) reported that 50% of children placed in foster care found keeping in contact with friends difficult. This was supported by a survey which found that 34% of young people in foster care had difficulties in sustaining links with friends and neighbours (Who Cares Trust, 1993 p.44).

It was important to establish the meaning of friendship to assess whether the group was referring to friends as mates for company or to friends who could offer emotional and practical help when needed. All young women spoke of the importance of friendships and the qualities they were looking for in friends. The qualities which were particularly highlighted were 'being able to trust friends', 'having a laugh' and 'having company'. The emphasis on trust could point to the fact that emotional support and being able to rely on somebody was important, just as much as a common interest and having fun. This was also a point made by Griffin (1985). Sometimes the importance of trust was highlighted through the bitter experience of being let down.

"I have to get to know them now before I learn to trust them."

(Mary4)

"Your friends are understanding. I've worked out who I can trust in the last 6 months."

(Holly2)

In addition, advice and support was emphasised.

"Somebody you can turn to and talk to, doesn't judge you and you can be yourself."

(Charlie4)

"Friends should be there when you need them, when you have a problem and you can talk to them about it."

(Kim4)

In this study, the sample were more likely to go out with friends, expected help when there was a problem and wanted to rely on the help. In addition, friends provided company for those living on their own. There was evidence early in the interviews that the cohort retained some school and neighbourhood friends as well as work mates.

The restriction of accommodation on friendships

Griffin (1985) found that girls mainly met at each other's house. 9 out of 24 said that they had found it difficult to see their friends in the place they had been staying. This restricted friendships. It applied mainly those in foster homes, hostels and living at home. It was unclear whether carers had disapproved or whether the women felt they were imposing in what was not their home.

"My friends are really nice straight people and I think she (foster carer) has this thing that because I'm a foster child I have all these outrageous friends. She seems to think that I hang around with these really awful people and they are going to rob the place which is a load of rubbish."

(Pat2)

"I don't bring friends here. I don't know. It doesn't feel right."

(Nancy1)

Conflict

Banks et al (1992) found that many young women retained the same friends particularly if they remained locally in training or were unemployed. Those who went to university or started work might lose touch with friends. The authors did not highlight conflict and fights with friends leading to aggression. Banks et al (1992) found that a common pattern was for young women to have a best friend and a group of girlfriends with whom they would go out regularly. There was evidence in this study that among the young women leaving care, friendship networks were much less stable. 8 out of 24 talked about having a best friend but in nearly half the cases the relationship ended suddenly. Because of this, the level of ongoing support from friends was weak. Friends seemed to become close very quickly and then the friendship ended just as quickly because of arguments when they shared accommodation or as a result of other changes in their lives. Sometimes there had been fights over boyfriends or what 'somebody had said about them'.

There was evidence that conflicts could not be resolved other than by ending the relationship. There were difficulties in maintaining relationships with friends if their high expectations were not met.

It wasn't possible to compare these patterns to other leaving care studies as those did not examine friendship patterns in detail. Howe (1995) using attachment theory argued that children whose relationship with their mothers had been ambivalent because of neglectful and inconsistent parenting were likely to demand too much of their friends.

"Ambivalent children are inclined to demand too much of their friends. In their anxious need for closeness, attention and intimacy they can be overbearing and integrating...their anxieties make them over-sensitive to the normal ups and downs of relationships."
(Howe, 1995 p. 120)

There were also some who spoke of friends 'causing trouble' or 'talking behind their back', but no detailed description of the events were given.

"I don't like people shitting on me all the time. If they shit on me they get a smack in the mouth."
(Mo3)

"One girl, I hate her now. She wanted to go out with my boyfriend. I told her to fuck off...Some of them have been...stupid, like kick shops in."
(Nancy3)

This evidence of aggression, which the young women also referred to when staying with friends, has been explained as the result of avoidance attachment, whereby children who have been abused are mistrustful and avoid close relationships because of a fear of being let down. They are unable to give and take in relationships and react aggressively.

"There is that lurking...for intimacy and recognition but the children have no skills in acquiring such experiences. Aggression only brings rejection and social isolation. The only way to cope...is to develop ...an aggressive independence."
(Howe, 1995 p.121)

Becoming a parent

Those who had become parents felt they had less in common with their friends. They were going out less and had to be more responsible and mature than their friends. In some cases this meant that they were becoming increasingly isolated.

"I haven't seen any of them for ages. I keep myself to myself. I see T but she's got two babies now so she's not got time. I can't be bothered to see them with him (baby). I spend more time with him."

(Linda4)

"There's not many school friends around, it's different because of the baby. A lot of them don't wanna know, especially people I used to hang around with...Sometimes I look at my friends now and they're out in pubs and they are planning on going on holiday. Sometimes they act really childish...I can't relate to them, to what they've done, even though a lot more has gone on in my life than in theirs."

(Kate3)

Why some young women had no close friends

9 out of 24 did not speak of any close friendships throughout the 4 interviews. A number of factors were identified, like not having the opportunity to meet new people and the difficulties of being able to trust new people because of the experience of abuse or being in care. In this case there was less evidence that conflict could not be resolved but that there were difficulties in establishing relationships, (Quinton and Rutter, 1988). A number of members of the group had long term relationships with partners which showed that relationships could be maintained (Table 7.6).

"I don't make friends. I don't ever get really close to anyone. I have two friends. One is a lot older than me. I've tried to make friends more otherwise (baby) will think it strange if nobody ever comes round the house. I don't trust anybody...(6 months later). I never really had any good friends.

It's too far for them to come and I've lost all my friends because I can't get out to see them. I haven't got any friends to encourage me to do things, somebody to talk to. "

(Kelly2/3)

This young woman showed that having few friends was not just related to one factor. She was in a foster home a few miles from her home and this meant that she saw less of her friends. After leaving school and having a baby there were even fewer opportunities to maintain friendships. Finally, the experience of abuse and care was linked by her to not being able to trust people.

Another woman also pointed to the issue of trust and related it to abuse and being let down.

"I find it difficult to trust them...I am careful who I can trust because I've always been let down by everybody that's why I have trouble trusting anybody in making friends. I always feel different. I've had an imaginary friend. I feel the odd one out and it's been difficult making friends..."

(Mary3/4)

Finkelhor (1986) and Little (1995) also found that some children in care found it difficult to trust new friends. Some of those who did not have close friends gave the same reasons for friendships coming to an end. However, rather than make new friends, they became isolated because they were living at home or had become a parent and felt that there were no opportunities for making new friends.

"I don't bring friends. My mum interrogates them and shouts in front of them...One comes now and again but she isn't keen on coming cause both times she's seen my brother smashing the house up and it frightened her."

(Hannah3)

"I've lost contact with a lot of them because of the baby. You have to stand on your own two feet."

(Mo4)

Those, who spoke of mates and acquaintances, said that their younger sister was their best friend.

"I think we are a lot closer, we're getting older and we have a lot in common. My sister could have anything. I trust her. Really close friends are my sister...I don't really have any close friends apart from (partner) and my sister, like a lot of my friends are acquaintances."

(Diane2)

The nature of the support offered

Transition to independent housing

Staying with friends has been found to be an important source of accommodation for young women leaving home (Ainley, 1991) and homeless young women, (Dibblin, 1991). 6 out of 24 lived with their friends at various times but those were temporary stays when they had nowhere else to stay. In total 5 women lost accommodation through the difficulties friends were causing by coming round followed by an argument and a fight or break in.

6 out of 12 holding tenancies stated that their friends' support prevented loneliness, isolation and provided safety.

"My friends come round. My best friend lives only round the corner. She was my best friend at school...Sometimes I don't open the door if I don't want to see them.

My cousin has a key. I feel a lot safer in case I ever got into trouble and they can't get in. It gets boring, very lonely when nobody comes round and I'm sitting here by myself."

(Jaz2)

"I like having people here cause I've known them...I don't like being on my own...We have a laugh. We talk...I've got friends who are helping me out and they are staying with me because I still feel a bit uneasy about (staying by myself)..."

(Jo2/3)

This emotional support might have been important in helping them to remain in their accommodation. However, the reasons for giving up accommodation were usually related to financial difficulties, being broken into or violence. Friends were unable to provide financial help and, therefore, did not help to sustain accommodation under these circumstances.

Financial help

There was no evidence that friends offered any financial help when young women were running short of money. Neither were friends able to help with debts. It is possible that they did not ask friends to help financially as they were unlikely to have any more money than they themselves had.

Becoming a parent

Only 2 out of 24 listed friends as offering help with looking after children. Usually friendships were more likely to end once young women had become parents because they had less time and less in common.

Emotional support

The sample regularly listed friends as giving them emotional support, either providing company or listening to problems and offering advice. Good friendships could help build self esteem.

"The best thing was having such a good friend as Dee...You had more conversation out of her, she would back you with things. She'd help out and she's still doing it now. She helps me by talking to me, writing me letters saying 'you're going to be okay. "

(Jo3)

Friendships and support were not only a one way relationship and nearly 7 explicitly talked about the help they had given to their friends. They identified that they could help because of their own experiences. Although they could give advice they were aware that they could not act to solve their own problems.

"I helped a friend whose mother had died. She used to cry a lot and I used to help her. I used to say 'don't worry it'll be all right'. I talked to her. I liked being able to help. I still find people come to me with their problems."

(Ruby1)

"It's somebody to talk to. It's somebody for them (friends) to talk to, so it's them relying on you and you relying on them. It's a two way thing."

(Diane3)

Young women's views on friendships at the end of the study period

Due to changes in relationships and changes in the young women's lives, their attitudes towards friendships and its importance also changed. The values they cited were trust and respect rather than being able to offer support. Their conclusion seemed to be that you have to look after yourself and you trust few people and choose your friends carefully, (see Quinton and Rutter, 1988).

"Trust and learning how to keep their mouthy shut. Basically what I tell them must go no further but like I said before - only trust yourself."

(Mo4)

"I suss them out before I trust them. Ask them about their background, their life."

(Holly3/4)

To conclude, those young women who maintained contact with their families whilst they were in care were also more likely to remain in contact after moving into independence. In some cases the relationship was difficult but a minority were very positive about having re-established a positive relationship. These young women received considerable support, which helped the young women to maintain accommodation and manage their income. However, parents did not have a sufficient income to enable young women to find accommodation in the private sector.

10 young women did not have any close contact with their families and this lack of contact had started in care. They did not receive any financial or practical help. The women were angry at, particularly, mothers for failing to support them and did not feel able to trust them. However, this lack of support did not seem to undermine their transition to independence. The importance of family support would need to be tested on a wider sample.

The majority changed partners frequently and there was little practical support offered. A minority established long term relationships and in those cases partners often offered emotional as well as financial support. Those women who cohabited with a partner did so unplanned and most of the arrangements broke down suddenly.

There was evidence that some women without family support also had difficulties in maintaining relationships with friends and partners and this had started in care. Recently found friends and partners were more likely to undermine the transition because of their violent behaviour which led to evictions. These women pointed out that they found it difficult to establish relationships because they could not trust anybody. Howe (1995) highlighted the relevance of attachment theory in understanding the difficulties of building and maintaining relationships for those who experienced poor parenting. The importance of maintaining relationships was recognised by the Department of Health in the Guidance to the Children Act 1989 and stressed in the preparation for leaving care. However, the cohort received little help from social workers on this issue. The importance of managing relationships in the transition to adulthood requires further investigation.

Section 8: Social Work Support After Moving into Independence

Introduction

This section examines the professional after care support by social workers and foster carers after the young women had moved into independence. This material was gathered at all 4 interviews. The fourth and final interview examined the young women's evaluation of the leaving care experience and support up to the age of 19.

Social work support

The statutory duty to advise and befriend young people leaving care up to the age of 21 is outlined in the Children Act 1989. Kirby (1994a) found that 90% of homeless care leavers had no regular contact with social workers after they moved into independence. In this study 12 out of 24 had social work contact for less than 6 months after moving into independence. 7 were supported for more than 12 months. Those who moved into independence when they were 16 or 17 were more likely to receive social work support for longer, possibly because there was a statutory duty to allocate a worker until a young woman had legally left care. However, for 11 out of 24 social work contact ended before they were 18 years old. The level of contact was not necessarily a sign of a good quality service. The earlier literature review argued that the fieldwork approach could vary in the quality of the service provided if it was delivered by busy professionals. A report by Save the Children Fund (1995) added that 75% of care leavers felt the after care support they had received had been too little. 40% felt that they had received no support at all. Similarly, 15 out of 21 in my sample felt that they had received no help from their social workers once they left care.

"I was really low and felt depressed...She (social worker) has done piss all. I don't see her now...They don't see me as a priority any more. It makes me quite angry because at the beginning of the tenancy they said...she's gonna get all the help that she needs. 3 months later (she) couldn't be seen for dust..."

(Jo3)

"I sit here worrying, crying. Sometimes I feel rough...Learning to cope on my own has been hard, learning to cope with money on £20 a week...I wasn't ready to leave care... I haven't seen (social worker) for 4 months now."
(Mary4)

Table 8.1

	Good after care support	Poor after care support	Total
Good relationship with social worker in care	5	6	11
Poor relationship with social worker in care	1	9	10
Total	6	15	21*

This table only includes 21 responses as 3 were unknown because the final 2 interviews were not completed.

The table suggests a good relationship with a social worker in care was more likely to ensure good after care support, but it was not significant (p>0.05).

3 out of 9, who approached Social Services in a crisis, felt that they had received help. All the crisis situations were on the issue of housing. 5 out of 14 young women who had a serious housing problem said that they did not approach Social Services because they would be of no help.

The young women appreciated being given ongoing practical and emotional support. 3 were briefly supported by a specialist leaving care project. I had little information about the project because it involved only a small number of young women. The main aim of the project was to offer specialist preparation sessions for independence. A small number of young women were offered after care support on an appointment basis. Looking at the classification in the earlier literature review, the project fitted most closely into an independence approach. 2 young women were very positive about the help they had received.

"Anytime I'm in trouble I phone her up and she helps me out. If I've got nowhere to stay I phone her. If I've got no money I phone her. If I wanna talk to someone about something personal I phone her. She sorts everything out for me. When I was in my flat she sorted out the electric, the gas, the rent. She's sound. She's truthful. She doesn't lie to me....She makes sure that everybody is all right. She worries about you and she helped me a lot... "

(Amy)

One young woman favourably compared specialist to field social workers. The problems of busy field workers prioritising after care work was highlighted.

"She helped me with money, got me a hostel place, got food in, cooking. She did a lot of things...I thought I'd have nobody to talk to but she came every week...She didn't help with budgeting. People (specialist teams) come to see you regularly. She was one of the best. They are honest, they keep to their times and they help you out. I wouldn't go to (area team) for help...They are useless. You know when they say they come to see you, they don't."

(Kim4)

Specialist workers were seen as more supportive and separate from the care system. The young women valued workers sticking to agreements and showing commitment and care for them.

Although there is a duty to inform young people of their rights under the Children Act as well as a duty to publish services, neither Social Services Department was fulfilling its duties. 15 out of 24 had no awareness of the Children Act. Only 5 said they were aware of their rights under the Act. Kirby (1994a) found that most homeless care leavers would not return to Social Services for help. 15 out of 24 did not expect any help from social services in future.

Financial support after moving into independence

Local authorities also have a power to offer assistance in the form of cash or

accommodation for care leavers under section 24 of the Children Act 1989.

Since the implementation of the Children Act in 1991, there has been evidence of wide ranging variations in the level of financial support for care leavers. Save the Children Fund (1995) found that grants varied from nothing to £1,800. Young people also talked about the lack of clear information and procedures for financial support. These problems were also identified in this study. There seemed to be a complete absence of coherently followed financial procedures. Some women received leaving care grants and others didn't. 13 received financial help but 11 did not. Financial support usually took the form of rent payments until a young woman's 18th birthday (4) and leaving care grants (9). Grants varied in the same local authority from a £250 loan to a £600 grant. One could argue that this is appropriate if grants are based on need, however, both grants were for furnishing a flat. Only 2 asked for financial support after having lived independently. One was awaiting a rent deposit payment and the other received financial help during university holidays. Both had approached the Department and had to wait a number of weeks for a decision.

"P was supposed to keep an eye out but she hasn't. She keeps cutting her hours down and ...she takes months to get anything done. The deposit should have been paid 2 weeks ago... and it still hasn't come. I mean I could end up moving (again) if they don't pull their finger out."

(Alice2/3)

The lack of formal procedures regarding leaving care grants and rent in advance payments meant that young women had to struggle with a system which changed and depended on who they were talking to.

"When I found out I had to move. I just kept going back and going back. I lost count of the amount of times I had to go back and I'm still going back now. They didn't have a clue. They said that I weren't entitled to any money. Then there was a row. I've never seen this before. In the end I got through to her (duty worker) and she send this woman down. She told me ...at a maximum I would get £120 for furniture. I'm not allowed any grants because I work full time (£80 a week).

That's the only time I've seen her...I lost 2 flats because they were 'humming' and 'harring' whether I could have the money (for the bond)."

(Charlie4)

Help from foster families

The majority of the final care placements had ended in a breakdown of relationships. It was likely that the majority of young women would not be supported after leaving care. 17 out of 23 had no contact with their foster carers after they left. The remaining 5 received ongoing support. One young woman received supported from a former carer whom she was placed with in an emergency and whom she had left 2 years before moving into independence. The support given was less than found in a study by the National Foster Care Association (Fry, 1992) where there was considerable practical and emotional support. It is likely that the high breakdown rate in this study is not necessarily representative and accounted for the lack of contact. Those with a breakdown of a foster placement were significantly more likely to have no further contact ($p<0.01$).

Table 8.2

	On-going contact with foster carers	No ongoing contact with foster carers	Total
Breakdown of last foster placement	2	13	15
No breakdown in last foster placement	3	2	5
Total	5	15	20*

*This table applied to 20 young women placed in foster care.

"..I thought it was gonna be horrible finding it hard to live on my own, but I haven't...(It's been hard) coming to terms with leaving (foster home). It upset me. I don't see her. I'm not sure what to say. I feel guilty."

(Mary3)

In one case there was financial support but no further contact after an 18th birthday gift. Only one young woman was able to return to live with her foster carers after she had to leave a dispersed hostel and was homeless. All 5 had been in regular contact with their carers over the past 2 years and valued the emotional support they were given.

"It's usually J (I talk to)...She says the right things. She makes you feel important when I talk to anybody else they just say 'oh, yeah'."

(Kelly3)

Table 8.3

Evaluation of leaving care

What was difficult	Number
Lack of financial support	13
Lack of safety net/abandoned	7
No emotional support/dumped	7
Lack of housing	5
Lack of planning for leaving care	3
Having to cope on your own	3
Nothing was difficult	2
Total number of responses	40

At the final interview I asked the young women their views about what had been most difficult since they had moved into independence. Looking back they highlighted the lack of financial support, feeling abandoned and dumped by the department.

"I should have had more support from the social workers, maybe some more financial help. That isn't the most important but it would have helped. I was left in the crap. I'm still paying that flat off. More support but I didn't get it. That's the only thing I asked for and that doesn't cost anything. It costs less than forking out money... I felt like being dumped."

(Jo3)

"(None of the foster parents) stayed in touch...You can expect nothing from social services."

(Mary4)

For many the reality of leaving care had been extremely difficult. 14 out of 20 thought that leaving care had been worse than expected, only one young woman said it had not been as bad as they anticipated. The remaining 5 felt it had been as bad they thought it would be.

In conclusion, both local authorities in this study relied on field workers to provide the majority of the after care support. There was support for the argument in the earlier literature review that the fieldwork approach to leaving care and after care failed to meet the support needs of many. The women felt that their social worker had provided little after care support. A small number valued specialist worker's support because the workers were said to be reliable and caring, offering practical as well as emotional support.

The specialist leaving care service closed before the majority of the young women moved into independence and it was, therefore, not possible to compare its effectiveness with the after care support offered by fieldworkers. A thorough analysis of specialist after care services was undertaken by Biehal et al (1995). However, the Biehal study was also unable to compare the after care experience of young people experiencing specialist services with the fieldwork approach because of the lack of a sufficient sample.

Those women who received support from social services valued financial assistance. However, the amount of money given as leaving care grants varied widely within the same local authority. None of the young women were given written details of leaving care services and the majority were unaware of their rights under the Children Act 1989.

Both local authorities relied heavily on foster care to meet the needs of the young women. The large number of foster home breakdowns was linked to the low level of support given by foster carers.

Social workers could have been an important source of support for those young women who did not have the support of families or partners. This was not the case and left them potentially without any adult help. For the young women the poor quality of the social work support, which they identified in care, continued after moving into independence.

In their evaluation of leaving care at the age of 19 the young women said that they felt they had been abandoned. Financial problems had been especially difficult since moving into independence.

These findings have implications for after care services. There is a need to ensure that fieldworkers remain in contact with care leavers and offer consistent advice and support. There is a role for specialist leaving care services which may be seen to be more supportive to young people as specialist workers are seen as separate from social services. The findings highlighted the need for clear leaving care policies and procedures which require workers to be trained to ensure consistent implementation.

There is also a need to investigate the role of foster carers in offering after care services, (Fry, 1992). If the last placement before moving into independence disrupted then ongoing support from carers seems unlikely. It may be possible to investigate the role of a pool of carers offering support rather than assuming that the last placement in care will continue to offer support.

The poor assessment of the care and leaving care experience raises questions about the quality of social work offered. Social services departments should consider undertaking regular evaluation of their work including feedback by care leavers to improve services.

The young women commented that they had felt dumped and abandoned by social services. This could have effected their self esteem and emotional well-being. The role of these and other health issues is referred to in the next section.

Section 9: Health

Until recently little attention focused on the health of young people in care. The Who Care's Magazine raised the issue of poor health among young people in care, particularly the high number of young people smoking, as did a study by Save the Children Fund, (1996). Stein and Carey (1986) had related depression among care leavers to the isolation of living independently. In addition, a number of studies looked at health issues among homeless people, (Anderson et al, 1993; Dibblin 1991). These studies emphasised the high number of people suffering from depression, anxiety and stress, flu and cold symptoms, sexual harassment and suicide attempts. Anderson et al (1993, p.26) found that 29% of people living in hostels and B&B were suffering from depression.

"The most commonly reported health problems were 'depression, anxiety or nerves', followed by 'heavy drinking or alcohol related problems', 'painful muscles or joints', 'chronic chest condition or breathing difficulties'...women were more likely than men to suffer from health problems. Among those in hostels and B&B, almost three quarters of women...said that they had at least one health problem."

(Anderson et al, 1993 p.25)

The recent interest in health issues among young people in general contributed to the attention in the leaving care and youth homelessness literature. In this study, health issues formed only a small part and issues became more apparent during the final 3 interviews.

Table 9.1

Health problems	Number
Depression and anxiety	14
Rapid weight loss	8
Self harm	7
Given anti depressants	7
Suicide attempts	5
Aching limbs and headaches	4
Frequent colds, feeling tired	3
Total	48*

*More than one answer was possible

During the final 3 interviews I asked the sample to list any health problems they had experienced. I did not ask them specifically to link this to any one particular issue although most of them did. During the 12 months fieldwork 16 out of 22 said that they suffered from at least one health problem. 13 out of 22 suffered from more than one. In addition, 2 women spoke of feeling low during their pregnancy and one spoke of the difficulties of coping with a new born baby. 20 out of 24 women were smoking.

Depression and anxiety

Depression and anxiety was the health problem most frequently referred to by 14 out of 24 after they had moved into independence. A report by the British Youth Council (1996) found that 5% of young people were seriously depressed. The problem of depression was also highlighted by Kirby (1994a) in a report by Centrepont on young people leaving care and homelessness. In the cited study all young people were currently homeless, staying predominantly in emergency and short term hostels. In this study, depression and anxiety not only applied to those in temporary accommodation. 5 out of 10 were holding tenancies and 5 were living in temporary accommodation. Those who were depressed were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with their housing ($p<0.05$).

Table 9.2

Depression and housing situation up to last completed interview

	Dissatisfied with housing	Not dissatisfied with housing	Total
Depression	10	4	14
No depression	5	2	6
Total	15	6	21

*This table only deals with 21 young women who answered this question.

Table 9.3

Depression and sexual abuse up to the last completed interview

	Sexually abused	Not sexually abused	Total
Depression	9	5	14
No depression	3	7	10
Total	12	12	24

Having been sexually abused did not make depression more likely ($p>0.05$).

Kelly was 18 years old and had a small baby. She was living in foster care and had been waiting for a council tenancy for over 6 months. She was coping well with the baby. However, the baby was sleeping in her bedroom, she was living 3 miles away from any friends and family and there was no adequate public transport. She desperately wanted to move and settle with her baby in a permanent home.

"I've been really depressed but I just have to live with it and keep taking the tablets. (GP) has taken me off them now because I was hallucinating but he put me back on them."
(Kelly3)

Jo was 17 years old. She had recently moved into a privately rented one bedroom flat. She had been harassed by a group of young men coming to the flat. In addition, there had been 2 break-ins. She was worried about staying in the flat on her own.

"I get depressed because of all the trouble...I've been having a lot of tension headaches, passing out, pressure I reckon. A lot has happened. He (GP) just gives me tablets."
(Jo2)

Mandana Hendessi (1992) described that 30% of victims of sexual abuse were prescribed anti depressants. In this study one young woman related her depression to the effects of having been sexually abused. Diane was 19 years old. She had been living in a shared house for 18 months. She was supported by her partner and his family. She was doing well at college.

"I felt really, really lonely. I go up and down in moods as well. I lost 2 stone. I was really, really depressed and lately I've had trouble sleeping...I don't know if that's because I'm not eating properly. I'm supposed to go to the doctor today but I got out of it... "
(Diane4)

Depression was a serious problem for young women and left many feeling upset and tired. They sought medical help and eight were given medication. But most felt that anti-depressants weren't a solution and they were not happy about taking them. After a period of time they stopped taking tablets and tried to bring about change themselves, either by finding somewhere else to live, finding a course or employment. Only 2 woman said that they were referred for counselling. Kelly did not feel that counselling had helped her in the 6 months since she had been given anti-depressants.

"I'm just really paranoid about the way I look or the way I dress or people laughing at me, everything and I have a lot of hang ups the way I am. I've been referred to a counsellor. I had some counselling (earlier) but she was not a very good counsellor ...she said she wasn't that good and didn't have enough experience. That didn't help me."
(Kelly3)"

Suicide attempts and self harm

In addition to depression and anxiety, a small number of young women spoke about having taken an overdose and harming themselves.

The British Youth Council reported that about 3% of young people self harm, (1996). Nationally every 2 - 3 % of girls aged 15 - 19 undertake a suicide attempt, (British Youth Council, 1996). Self Harm and suicide attempts were also pointed to in Anderson et al (1993) and Kirby (1994a). Kirk et al (1991) found that all of those young people who had a history of self harm had been sexually abused. In this study the reasons for self harm or taking an overdose were complex and it is not possible to refer to one specific reason. 6 young women spoke of their unsatisfactory housing condition together with feeling upset about splitting up from a partner and just feeling very low with seemingly no opportunity for change.

Kim was 18 and a half years old when she spoke about self harming herself. She had been living in a hostel for seven months. Her social worker had left and the case had not been re-allocated. She only had little contact with her former foster carers at the time. She had also recently lost her job. She had very little money and did not know how she was going to afford to rent a flat with her boyfriend.

"I've been depressed during the day. It didn't help having nothing to eat either. I was right pissed of (being here). I cut my arm again which I do when I'm upset. I started doing it more and more when my dad died. I don't know why. Just feeling depressed."
(Kim2)

Hannah had moved back to her parents at the age of 18 after staying in a number of hostels. She had suffered from flash backs in the past. She was very unhappy about staying at home. However, she did not want to live in a hostel. She had no friends she could stay with and remained at home only to avoid sleeping rough. She was unemployed and did not have the money to leave home.

"I've come close to committing suicide but I haven't taken any tablets...I just feel very depressed...I'll probably be dead, all the tablets doesn't help. It doesn't change...(12 months)
(Hannah2)

To conclude, health issues had received little attention in the care and leaving care literature, (Biehal et al 1995). Homelessness studies had highlighted the link between poor housing and poor health, (Anderson 1993). Health issues formed only a small part of this study.

The majority of the young women listed at least one health problem and half listed more than one. Depression and anxiety, rapid weight loss and self harm were most cited. The sample linked depression and anxiety to unsatisfactory housing conditions. A small number spoke of suicide attempts.

Due to the limited information available, the analysis of health issues was restricted. I did not ask the group for the causes of their health problems in detail. A more detailed examination of the relationship between the mental and physical health and the pressures of managing the leaving care transition during the interviews would have been desirable. Such an exploration may have shown the causes of depression, self harm and suicide attempts. I also did not question the women in detail about the health services they had received and this may have been why mental health services were not referred to by the sample. Furthermore, there was no evidence here that the majority of the young women confided in social workers to receive psychological help or counselling.

There is a need for further research into the health of young people in care and care leavers to deepen our understanding of the health needs of young people. The guidance to the Children Act 1989 stresses the importance of good health care. The health needs of young people in care and care leavers need to be addressed by practitioners in social services and health care services to ensure a full health assessment. Leaving care workers should raise health and sexual health issues with young people to investigate and make provision for, for example depression and anxiety and self harm.

Chapter 4: Development of a Classification of the Young Women

In July 1993, towards the end of the data collection for the main study, I considered further fieldwork. The above analysis had shown that the majority who moved into insecure housing found permanent housing. The majority of those, who moved into planned secure housing, maintained this. This led to 4 possible further areas of investigation. I wanted to know whether:

- those who had moved from insecure housing and homelessness to secure housing lost this accommodation again and became homeless,
- other young women who moved initially into insecure housing found permanent housing by the time they were 19 years old,
- those who had been homeless and moved home to live with their mothers and avoided further homelessness were able to plan a move to permanent housing,
- there were young women who had been living continually in temporary homelessness accommodation since the age of 17 and were still living in temporary accommodation at the age of 21 and why this was the case.

To achieve this, I considered interviewing a sample of young women aged 19 - 22 who had been in care and who either were homeless now or who had been homeless in the past and were now in permanent housing (Appendix D). However, after a great deal of effort I was only able to locate 6 young women who met the criteria by January 1994. So I abandoned this form of follow-up and concentrated on further analysis of the material from the Initial Study.

Development of a typology

Having analysed the longitudinal study in detail, there were a number of themes emerging from the findings, which had not been covered in the leaving care or youth homelessness literature.

I was struck by the number of young women who had experienced family conflict and/or sexual abuse. There were also differences in the young women's care experience. A small number settled in long term foster placements. The majority moved frequently through a succession of foster and residential placements. 14 out of 24 young women experienced homelessness. 5 out of 20 were homeless at the end of the study period. Some of the young women had problems in either establishing or maintaining friendship networks, others didn't.

There were differences in the amount of family support among the sample. Partners played an important part in the provision of emotional support for some women. Furthermore, some young women were more successful in managing the transition to adulthood in terms of housing, employment and income and becoming a parent than others.

The analysis so far had examined each issue separately The next step was a to re-read the transcripts and attempt to identify patterns in experience through time, of individuals or groups of young women. Having read the transcripts I identified a small number of potential characteristics which might have led to groupings among the cohort, for example, the age of being admitted to care, the number of placement disruptions and homelessness. I did not find that any of these factors by themselves enabled me to identify groups which shared a common experience. I then started to look at the transcripts chronologically starting with the young women's family experiences. I found that by reading the material I could identify 2 groups:

- those who had experienced abuse and neglect since they were young children
- those who had experienced reconstituted families and /or family conflict and who had reacted with challenging behaviour as teenagers

Once the young women were in care I found that within each group there was one major difference. Each group had members who had a period of stability between the age of 9 and 16 or 14 and 17. The remainder of each group moved frequently without a settled period in one placement. I decided to divide the sample into those 4 groups before reading the material relating to the transition to adulthood.

The groups were:

- those who experienced abuse or neglect and who had a stable period in care
- those who experienced abuse and neglect but did not have a stable period
- those who displayed challenging behaviour and had a stable period in care
- those who displayed challenging behaviour but did not have a stable period in care

In reading the interview material relating to the period after the young women left their last care placement I found differences between the 4 groups in the way they coped with the demands of living independently, handling money and looking after children. The main difference was between those who had good personal skills and coped relatively successfully with the transition to adulthood, those who coped well after they had a major change in their lives such as a baby or a tenancy and those who struggled with the transition to adulthood, had experienced homelessness, debts and problems in looking after their children, had poor decision making skills, could not maintain relationships and struggled with carrying responsibility. The major factors which explained the differences between the groups emerged through reading the material, considering the evidence of the thematic analysis and comparison with the literature. The result was the following typology of

Group A: Victims of Abuse - Successful transition to adulthood - **Survivor**

Group B: Victims of abuse - Problematic transition to adulthood - **Victim**

Group C: Challenging behaviour - Successful transition to adulthood - **Settler**

Group D: Challenging behaviour - Problematic transition to adulthood - **Challenger**

Lofland and Lofland (1971) describe the process of typologising as

“the units under study seem to possess some complex but systematic interrelation. In such a case, you can often discover what the inter relation is by specifying a small number of relevant variable factors whose *conjoint* variations accurately incorporates the patterns you have already discerned.”

(Lofland and Lofland, 1971 p. 96).

The main characteristics on which the 4 groups of this typology could be distinguished were:

- evidence of sexual abuse
- evidence of family conflict leading to challenging behaviour
- close identification with peer group
- age at admission to care
- at least one stable placement in care
- relationship breakdown in foster care
- expectation of moving into independence
- age at moving into independence
- stable housing experience
- homelessness
- stable employment experience
- level of support from family or partners
- carrying responsibility and decision making skills
- self esteem

A detailed exploration of the typology follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Typology

Introduction

This section presents the typology in detail. There were 4 groups:

Group A: Victims of Abuse - Successful transition to adulthood - Survivor

Group B: Victims of abuse - Problematic transition to adulthood - Victim

Group C: Challenging behaviour - Successful transition to adulthood - Settler

Group D: Challenging behaviour - Problematic transition to adulthood - Challenger

Group B had 2 Sub groups within it. Sub group 1 had experienced abuse and neglect and had not had a stable placement in care. Sub group 2 had experienced neglect, a parent's death and parental illness which led to care. They had a stable care experience defined as a placement lasting from 9 - 16 or 15 - 17. This Sub group left care early because they wanted freedom and independence.

I firstly present a chart which summarises the characteristics of each group. This is followed by a description of the similarities and differences among the 4 groups. I then present the 4 groups in detail and each of them is preceded by a case study illustrating the main characteristics of the group. The case studies were selected to represent the main characteristics of the typology. If aspects of the case study were not representative, then differences are referred to in the detailed analysis which follows the case study.

The 4 groups were presented as ideal types first in the chart.

“An ideal type is a logical extreme, an ideal form, a hypothetical case, a pure case, or an ideal construct.”

(Lofland and Lofland, 1971p. 98)

Chart

Dimension	Group A	Group B Sub group 1	Group B Sub group 2	Group C	Group D
Sexual Abuse	high rate	high rate	none	none	none
Family conflict	low rate	medium rate	high rate	high rate	high rate
Challenging behaviour	no	no	no	yes	yes
Age at admission to care	variable	variable	variable	teenager	teenager
Stability in care	stable placement 9-16 or 14-17	no stable foster placement, frequent relationship breakdown	stable foster-placement	stable foster or hostel placement 14-16 or 15-18	no stable foster placement, challenging behaviour continued
Expectation of independence	scared and worried	scared and worried	freedom	freedom	freedom
Age moving into independence	18	16 - 18	17-18	16	16 - 18
Planned move	yes	no	no	2 out of 3 planned	no
1st independent housing	secure	mainly insecure	insecure	2 out of 3 secure	insecure
Ability to maintain housing	good	poor	poor	good once settled	poor
Homelessness	no risk	high risk	high risk	high risk until settled, then low risk	high risk
Employment/ child care	good	unstable	unstable	unstable until settled, then stable	unstable
Income management	good	poor	poor	learned through independence and family support	poor
Support of family	poor	poor	poor	good	good
Support of partner	good	poor	poor	poor	poor
Self esteem	poor	poor	poor	good	poor
Ability to carry responsibility	good	poor	poor	learned through living independently	poor
Decision making skills	good	poor	poor	learned living independently	poor

Similarities and differences among the groups

Groups A and B experienced abuse and neglect. In groups C and D there was evidence of family conflict due to parental expectations, sibling rivalry and the dynamics of a reconstituted family. The result were feelings of anger, mistrust and guilt for the young women in groups A and B, and predominantly anger and resentment in groups C and D.

Groups A and B reacted by punishing themselves through, for example self harm and isolation from peers. In contrast, groups C and D were outer- directed, challenging the authority of family, school and the law. Groups C and D identified with peers. The differences in feelings of guilt and mistrust on the one hand and anger on the other were carried into the relationships with foster carers and social workers when in care.

There were similarities between groups A and C. Both groups experienced at least one stable placement in care, either a continuous placement between the age of 9 and 16 or at least two and a half years between 14 and 17.

There were also a number of differences between groups A and C. Contact with parents was continual or re-established without the involvement of social services for those in group C, either whilst they were in care or once they had moved into independence. Those in group A had little or no contact with their parents. This lack of contact was related to the effects of childhood abuse and what the young women in group A perceived to be their mother's continuing failure to offer sustained help and support. Thus group A regarded social services as their safety net and had the expectation that emotional needs should be met. This was not the case for most in group C. Their family support acted as their safety net.

As young women left care; the differences between both groups continued. Both groups acknowledged the new responsibilities they had to carry. However, the women in group A felt that being in care had not met their needs for emotional support, stability and security.

They looked to themselves and their new partners to fill this gap. Knowing that they could not rely on the 'child care system' or their families they had no option but to take responsibility. In contrast the women in group C were almost overwhelmed by the responsibilities of living independently. However, after enjoying what they perceived to be their independence, they experienced life changes which transformed their behaviour to becoming responsible at work, for a tenancy and a baby. In contrast to group A, they had the extensive support of a member of their family rather than a partner.

Group C resolved some of their anger.. They did not show of the same amount of self harm as Group A and had higher levels of self esteem. The young women felt that both they and their family had changed. They had negotiated a new relationship and had dealt with 'care' by referring to it as a 'phase'.

The women in Group B also had similarities with Group A in the early phase of the experience of their family and care. In both groups the abuse had been traumatic. Members of both groups mainly reacted to their experience by punishing themselves; for example through self harm.

The transition to adulthood was problematic in the case of groups B and D and thus there were some similarities as well as differences. Both groups experienced numerous moves in care, but there were differences in the reasons for foster home disruptions. Breakdowns in placements occurred due to problems in establishing and maintaining relationships for some women in group B whilst it was their continuing challenging behaviour which led to breakdowns in placements for group D.

Most women in groups B and D experienced periods of homelessness, debts, changes in employment and difficulties in coping with children. The differences could only be seen by looking closer at the descriptions of their situations. The young women in group B had little or no effective support from their parent/s and were isolated from peer groups. The majority of them did not have any close friends. Women in this group saw themselves as victims and held their parent/s and social services responsible for their situations.

The women in group D had wanted freedom from the care system and most had some contact with families. They were less isolated from peers but relationships with friends were often short-lived.

A minority of women in Sub group 2 of group B had similarities with group D when they moved into independence. Like group D these women emphasised freedom and independence over losing a safety net after moving into independence. They were also those who had not been abused and their care experience had been stable. Like group D they rejected responsibility, choosing instead freedom and independence which led to crisis, homelessness, loss of employment and failure in exams, in turn undermining their plans for the future. There was some support from families or former foster families which helped them and prevented further homelessness. They were not part of group D because they showed more signs of being neglected and physically abused, anger was directed at themselves resulting in self harm. They did not challenge their isolated position within the family by extrovert behaviour such as night clubbing, petty crime or truanting.

Group A: Victim of Abuse/Neglect - Successful Transition to Adulthood - Survivor

Members of group A: Kelly, Diane, Mary, Sally, Charlie, Lisa

Case study

Kelly grew up with 3 sisters and her mother. Her parents separated when she was 2 years old. At the age of 7 her mother re-married. Her step father sexually abused her from the age of 9 until 11. By the age of 12, the abuse had been disclosed and her step father had left. Kelly felt angry with her mother for 'blaming' her for the abuse and for saying she 'must have led him on'. She described the relationship with her mother as 'very bad, hating her'. Kelly started running away and after being picked up by the police disclosed. At the age of 14 she was taken into care and placed in a number of emergency foster homes. She then stayed with long term foster carers where she remained for two and a half years until she was 17 years old.

At the age of 17 she discovered that she was pregnant. She completed her GCSEs. There was not enough space for her and a baby in the foster home and the relationship with her foster mother had become strained. Kelly and her foster mother decided together that the placement should come to an end and Kelly moved to a mother and baby foster placement when she was 17 and a half. Her son was born shortly after she moved and she remained in this placement for the next 15 months waiting for a council tenancy. She moved into a council tenancy at the age of 18 and 9 months. Kelly cared well for her baby which she said was acknowledged by her social worker. 'I think they were surprised how well I coped. I didn't think I could love somebody so much'. She also managed to save money and did not have any debts. She received limited support from her partner. 'I go out with him because I don't have the strength not to. He takes me for granted...he is better than nobody'. Kelly demonstrated that she had good decision making skills and was responsible. The mother and baby placement was with an older woman and 3 miles out of town. Kelly had wanted to leave but felt that there had been no alternatives. 'I thought of leaving. I packed my bags. But then I thought, where would I go? He is safe here and I am responsible for him...I've got a lot more responsibility. I can't make rash decisions on the spur of the moment. I have to plan everything'. Although she was coping well, Kelly had low self esteem. 'I have such a low opinion of myself. You act more responsible because you are always aware that you are more insecure'. By the final interview Kelly was living in her own flat and caring for her son.

Family experience

Little (1995) in an assessment of therapeutic communities, and Packman (1986), contrasted the careers of children in care because of abuse and neglect with those in care because of fragmented families and difficult behaviour of the child.

All the young women in this group experienced abuse and neglect apart from one, whose mother died and who was then abandoned by her grandparents and her father. One of the women was of mixed heritage. There were no major differences between her experience and those of the rest of the group. Those who remembered the abuse as teenagers felt they had been blamed for this by being told 'it was their fault'.

The effect of being held responsible for the abuse led to feelings of anger and mistrust. This effect of abuse has also been claimed by others, (Finkelhor et al, 1986). Howe (1995), reviewing the literature on attachment theory, explained these reactions as the result of the lack of attachment between children and care givers in their early years. The abused child's underlying desire was to be loved and cared for. As these needs were not met children reacted with anger and resentment, (Ainsworth, 1978).

As abuse victims they internalised their feelings which were vocalised as 'it was my fault' and 'I wouldn't speak to nobody, everybody was a threat'. Those who remained at home until they were teenagers increasingly experienced family conflict. Running away was used as a strategy by 3 of them to escape the abuse.

When the abuse was disclosed or after repeatedly running away the young women were admitted to care.

Care Experience

Biehal et al (1995), Little (1995) and Bullock (1993) found differences among children in care depending on, for example, the age at which children were admitted to care, movement and stability (foster or residential care), length of time in care and contact with family.

All members of this group were placed with foster families but one woman stayed in foster care for only one week. She was placed by social services with her grandmother for 9 years. None of the others were placed with relatives. 3 out of 6 were admitted to care as young children under 5, the others were teenagers.

The group experienced a stable foster or relative's placement either between the ages of 9 and 16 or 14 and 17 years. Although they valued the stability and security they were also critical of the care they had received. Only one young woman felt that she had been a member of the family and was valued.

The remaining 5 did not feel cared for and part of the family.

The conflicts which were developing in their deteriorating relationships with foster mothers led to foster home breakdowns in 5 out of 6 cases. They had not found a substitute family. 'I never had a proper family', 'I should have been adopted', 'They don't provide you with a family who loves and carers for you'.

Members of the group demonstrated that they considered the consequences of their actions in foster care. 2 had seriously thought about leaving care and moving into independence because of poor relationships with foster mothers. They decided to stay so that they would receive financial support and 'at least they have to find me somewhere to live'.

In the absence of a supportive family they concluded that they had to be responsible for themselves. Howe (1995) referred to this as compulsive self reliance as they had learned that close relationships brought pain and hurt. 'I had to be independent and look after myself', 'I've always been independent...'

Despite the evidence of running away and disrupted schooling 4 out of 6 had educational qualifications.

There was little evidence of stable friendships with peers and they later related this to their inability to trust others, changes in schools and foster homes.

3 members of the group had no contact with their parents or the wider family. 2 had irregular contact but described their relationship with mothers and in one case a father as poor.

Expectations of moving into independence

Moving into independence was associated with fear. 'Really scared, no financial support, no mum and dad to rescue'. 'If you're 18 you're kicked out, being cut off, forgotten, dumped'.

Transition to independent housing

3 young women were over 18 when they moved into independence, 2 were 16 and 1 was 17 years old.

The majority of the group found secure housing in council tenancies, lodgings and a student house. The housing situation of this group was very stable. All those who held tenancies maintained them and did not move.

Transition to employment and education

Biehal et al (1995) used employment and training histories or careers as outcome dimensions in assessing the way care leavers managed the transition to independence. The employment and child care history of this group was stable. After leaving school 2 had become parents and were caring for their child. 3 members of the group were employed, either as trainees or in a factory and 1 woman was a university student. Only 1 out of 6 was unemployed.

Becoming a parent

2 members of the group had become parents at the age of 17 and 18. They felt additional responsibility for the care of their child which impacted on their lives. They took account of the baby when making decisions about where they wanted to live and how they spent their money and spare time. 'Finding out about what to do. I can't just leave, it's not fair on (him). Can't just go out, no time for myself'.

Support Network

There is consensus in the literature on the importance of young people's ability to build and maintain relationships, informally with friends, partners and family and formally with agencies and for example landlords, (Biehal et al 1995, Jones, 1995, Bullock et al 1993).

For these 6 women, partners provided money, child care and practical help as a minimum as well as being somebody to listen and to give advice. 'He's all I've got, I would crumble without him', 'I haven't got anybody apart from my boyfriend, I've never been so close'. Emotional support was minimal even from partners. Relationships with mothers were poor. They continued to feel angry and let down by their parent/s. 'I don't know what to think of my parents. I just keep blanking it out...thinking I've got my own life'. 'I haven't got a mum and dad.'

There were no long standing friendships with school or neighbourhood friends. 'I don't have any friends. I don't trust anybody. I'm not like others'. One young woman felt that her girlfriend provided her with emotional support, like 'being able to talk and go out'.

Taking responsibility and decision making skills

This group felt that they were responsible for themselves, their children, housing and paying bills. They accepted this and wanted to maintain their tenancies. 'It's the way you act, living on my own, paying bills, cleaning, make do with what I've got'. It wasn't clear whether those skills had been learned in foster care, at home or, for example, at school.

Self Esteem

Biehal et al (1995) argued that young people's sense of confidence increased by managing the transition to independence. The young women still felt depressed and upset although they had secure housing, few debts and some support. However, there had not been effective and consistent good counselling to help the group deal with the effects of abuse, neglect and being in care to prevent self harm and build self esteem. Poor self esteem was expressed in 'it's all my fault, feel really useless, can't do anything right', 'I never do my best, have a lot of hang ups, I have no confidence, never sure of anybody'. They also had insight into what had happened to them and thought that they had learned this through being in care. 'I learned that my family was not normal'. 'I learned about the effect of sexual abuse and what it means'.

In conclusion, the young women were called survivors because, despite childhood abuse and disruption, they had managed the transition to independence well. They did not make rash decisions and established at least one source of support. It wasn't clear where those skills were learned but the stability of at least one foster placement could have aided their ability to sustain relationships even when there were difficulties. A similar assessment of the outcomes for victims of sexual abuse who had stayed in a therapeutic community between the ages of 14 and 17 was made by Little (1995). Fonagy et al (1994) identified 13 factors which led to children developing resilience. This meant that the young women's resilience was due to skills and experiences learned through their childhood and adolescence. At least 8 of these factors applied to this group. They were at a younger age when they suffered a traumatic experience, had high IQs, superior coping styles, interpersonal awareness and empathy, availability in adulthood of good support, a good, warm relationship with at least one caregiver, positive school experiences, willingness to plan and an absence of organic deficits. Rutter and Rutter (1993) added that intelligence was influenced by environmental as well as genetic factors and helped to develop a reflective self which applied to the group here.

Group B: Victim of abuse/illness/neglect - Problematic Transition to Adulthood - Victim

There were 10 members of this group which could be divided into 2 Sub Groups.

- Group B Sub group 1: Ann, Ruby, Jo, Alice, Hannah
- Group B Sub Group 2: Kim, Jean, Viv, Kate, Janice

Case studies

Group B Sub group 1

Ann first came into care as a 10 week old baby after her parents physically abused her. The next 5 years were spent in and out of care and she later disclosed that her father sexually abused her during this time. At the age of 5, care proceedings were taken and there was no plan to return her to her parents.

Whilst in care she continued contact with her father and irregularly with her mother. Her father continued to abuse her sexually during visits until he died when she was 9. Ann could not recollect all of the 20 or more foster placements. Nearly all of them ended in a relationship breakdown with the carers. Only one placement lasted 4 years from the age of 9 until 13. Ann was aware that this had not been normal. 'I know I haven't had a normal life'. Ann was always angry with her mother for not caring for her. 'As far as I am concerned my whole family is dead'. Ann did not have any educational qualifications. She moved into her own tenancy at the age of 18. During the next 9 months, she was broken into twice and she wanted to leave by the final interview. She also had rent arrears and debts with fuel companies. By this time she had started training as a hairdresser, although she frequently changed training placements because she did not get on with her employer. Ann had little support after her move into independence. There was no evidence of stable friendships or partners. The relationship with her mother was still described as poor. By the final interview Ann did not admit that she was at risk of becoming homeless. She had poor decision making skills and wasn't able to cope with the responsibility of living independently. She looked poorly and felt terrible. 'It's been worse than I thought. It has been hell. I can't go out and enjoy myself anymore cause I haven't got the money. The place is a mess. It's lonely...It's a lot of responsibility being an adult...I am childish, immature, the things that I do'.

Sub group 2

Kim lived with her father and 3 older brothers after the parents divorced when she was one year old. She did not have any contact with her mother. Kim's father died when she was 13 and she was admitted to care after her brothers could not look after her. She was placed in a long term foster home where she stayed until she was 18 years old. She got on well with her carers but wanted to move to have more independence. 'I want my own bedroom, freedom to do what I want'. Kim had a planned move to a hostel. She remained there for 12 months. She had wanted to leave earlier but didn't have the money for a deposit or rent in advance. There were no plans made by the hostel for her to move to permanent housing. Kim was eventually evicted for rent arrears and conflict with other women in the hostel.

She briefly stayed with her mother with whom she had recently established a relationship. This only lasted a few weeks and Kim was bitter when she left. 'I don't want to know her. She's never been there for me'. Kim did not have anywhere to go and stayed with her partner and his friend in a place she described as 'disgusting'. Both of them moved to a bedsit which they found with the help of a local youth homelessness project. They were living there at the end of the study. Kim had various jobs which she lost after conflict with the employer. Her main support was her partner. There was no evidence of stable friendships. Kim felt that she was responsible but she left employment and the hostel without any alternatives. This led to benefit suspension, debts and homelessness. Kim felt that she was a victim of her circumstances which she felt she could not control. 'There are no jobs I can do. I can't find a place to live. It's too expensive'. She also had low self esteem. 'I've been insecure, I've been depressed a lot'.

Family Experience

All the women in this group could be described as victims of abuse, neglect and the consequences of their mothers' illness. They believed that they were punished for something they had done but the punishment was excessive. 'My dad got really drunk...He was pushing me about, my dad kicked me...From then on whenever I did something wrong he'd hit me...My dad said if anybody ever finds out you'll be in trouble.'

They felt guilty, angry and worthless and internalised these feelings before they were admitted to care. 'He said I was 'bad'. 'I worry and I feel really guilty'. Relationships with mothers were also described as poor and may have contributed to the fact that abuse was not disclosed. 'Mum doesn't talk to us...She gets depressed because of her illness'.

As teenagers' family conflict increased the young women's reaction changed, with spells of running away without having anywhere to stay. The majority did not disclose the abuse until they became teenagers.

Care experience

The majority of women were admitted to care as teenagers when they finally confided in a teacher, adult friend or older sibling. In nearly all cases statutory action was taken and as the perpetrator had stayed, the young women had to leave the family home. This reinforced the young women's feelings that they were responsible for the abuse and for having to move. In 3 cases they were admitted to care as children.

Sub group 1 experienced extensive disruptions in foster home relationships. None of them experienced a stable foster home as teenagers. Relationships broke down because the young women's expectations of finding a substitute family, who would love and care for them, were not met. 'They didn't accept me as part of the family...I didn't feel they cared about me...There was little evidence that the group was aware of conflicts escalating or placements breaking down in the near future.

Foster home disruptions and having to leave reinforced their feelings of guilt, mistrust and rejection. 'I feel very bitter. I feel resentful towards the system...An ugly person...why am I a reject?'

Attachment theory pointed out that these young women failed to make attachments when they were young children. This led to their inability to form stable relationships with carers, (Bowlby, 1980).

Sub group 2 experienced long term foster homes and a stable placement period of being cared for. Their experience showed that new attachments were possible and wanted. 'I felt part of the family...

Relationships in foster homes came under pressure when members of both groups wanted more freedom and independence to pursue boyfriends and friends at the age of 17 and 18. This led to them eventually leaving. The move and the reasons for it were not negotiated by the majority.

For some young women their lives had been so disrupted that they regarded the social services department as their family. 'I've been in care all my life. It's sort of like a family to me. I never had a proper family. Being in care I sort of had a family'.

Expectations of moving into independence

Those young women of Sub group 2, who wanted to leave foster care to have more freedom, were not aware of the problems they would be facing.

Transition to independent housing

Stockley et al (1992) argued that homelessness in itself did not lead to low self esteem or self harm. The group as a whole experienced extreme disruption after moving into independence.

For the majority their first independent housing was insecure; staying with friends, boyfriends, hostels and family members. 2 young women held a tenancy as their first independent accommodation. 7 out of 10 experienced homelessness. The group experienced the highest number of moves after moving into independence. They had difficulties in sustaining housing. There were no differences between the 2 Sub groups. Moves by this group were usually in crisis when relationships with friends, in lodgings or with partners had broken down. There was little evidence that the need for a move was foreseen. None of them were able to plan a move to secure housing. 'God knows what I'll do. My life changes like the wind. I don't know where I'll be living'. They were aware of their responsibilities but found it difficult to manage them.

By the final interview none of the young women were living in safe and secure tenancies. 3 were staying with their mothers, one was with former foster carers, one was about to be evicted from her tenancy, 2 were living with their boyfriend, 2 were in a B&B and one was living in a hostel. The instability which had characterised their experience of leaving care and moving into independence was set to continue.

Transition to employment and education

All 5 women in Sub group 1 completed education without any GCSE results. They had a history of running away and disruptive experiences at home and whilst in care. These could have contributed to the lack of educational qualifications. The women in Sub group 2 gained some GCSEs and 2 went on to further education and A Levels. Overall GCSE results were at the lower end.

After leaving school, their employment history varied and was not necessarily related to educational achievements. One young woman cared for her child and did not seek employment. One remained in full time education and 2 became unemployed. The remaining 6 members of the whole group had a number of training placements and full time jobs. None of them were able to hold on to training places or employment. They lost jobs because of conflict with their employer or colleagues.

The majority of the group had financial debts because of living on benefit, having their benefit cut and low wages.

Becoming a parent

One became a parent whilst she was in care. Another was pregnant at the time of the final interview. The responsibility of having a baby led to increased pressure which the young mother found difficult to deal with. 'I wanted freedom. The responsibility was too much. I weren't ready for it, that's why mum has got her now.'

Support Network

The young women in both Sub groups had poor support systems. Their relationship with parent/s was generally poor. Only one young woman felt that she and her mother had become closer after the birth of her daughter. For the other members there was much pain, resentment and bitterness because they had expected mothers to change and in their eyes there had been no change, with mothers taking no responsibility for the abuse the women had suffered. 'She's never been there for me. I see her when I go and see (sister). I don't talk to her'. 'I still don't forgive her for putting me in care'.

The group spoke of the importance of partners and new relationships. Their expectations of partners were high and when they failed to live up to these and provide the amount of love and care the women needed, relationships came under pressure and soon ended.

The majority did not speak of long term friendships. Some had mates to go out with. 3 who cited close friendships stayed with friends when they had nowhere to go, but these friendships deteriorated when they shared accommodation. Friends changed from one interview to the next. Like women in group A they found it difficult to trust anybody and some felt that their friends had let them down. If relationships deteriorated they held their friends and their behaviour responsible for the break up.

Taking responsibility and decision making skills

There was little evidence that members of both Sub groups were able to cope with the responsibilities of living independently, resulting in homelessness and debts. They made decisions in crisis and could not foresee the consequences of their actions, as the frequent moves demonstrated. It wasn't possible to assess why they had not learned to take responsibility for their own actions and assess the impact of the decisions they made.

Self Esteem

Like women in group A, this group had low levels of self esteem because there had been no consistent counselling to enable them to come to terms with the effects of abuse and being looked after. At the same time the women's poor self image was reinforced by the difficulties they experienced in housing, employment and personal relationships. A point also made in Finkelhor et al (1986). Low levels of self esteem were expressed in their descriptions of situations and events rather than in descriptions of themselves. 'I don't really care anymore. What's gonna happen is gonna happen. I worry about ending up dead....I hate myself. She (counsellor) tells me that it is not all my fault'. 'I feel lonely, depressed because of being treated like a piece of shit...'

Bullock et al (1993) identified a group of 'homeless, skillless adolescents' who had moved into independence without parental support, who had poor relationships with peers and poor employment and housing records. 3 young women in group B had similar outcomes and poor parental support. In addition, the combined effect of personal and structural factors meant that they continued to feel and act as victims of their situations. It is possible that the disruptive experience at home and, for some, in care led to poor personal skills in making decisions and maintaining relationships. Poor personal skills in taking responsibility and decision making were reinforced by their weak position in the housing and labour markets which meant that they had no access to secure and affordable housing and little prospect of finding employment.

Group C: Young Women with Challenging Behaviour - Successful Transition to Adulthood - Settler

There were 3 members in this group: Jaz, Mo, Amy

Case study

Jaz was the only Asian young woman in this study. She had a sister and 2 brothers. Her father was an alcoholic and violent. He also suffered from mental health problems. When she was 14 her mother divorced her father. Jaz had been angry about her father's behaviour. She also believed that she did not live up to her parents' expectations and was not accepted by the family. She reacted by running away to stay with friends, night clubbing and having white boyfriends. She saw herself as the 'rebel' in the family. She contacted Social Services through a friend and asked to be accommodated. She had one foster placement and 2 lodgings placements. The foster placement lasted from the age of 14 until 17 and Jaz completed her GCSE's during this time. The foster placement was 4 miles from any of her previous friends which might have accounted for curtailing her rebellious behaviour. She maintained contact with her mother. The foster placement disrupted because Jaz felt that her foster parents had been talking about her 'behind her back' and 'gone through things' in her room.

She initially liked the second lodgings placement because she had more 'freedom'. During the last 6 months before moving into independence her social worker applied for a tenancy for her and she moved shortly before her 18th birthday. The responsibility of having her own tenancy and a full time training placement led her to 'settle down' and consider 'other people's opinions'. She also felt she had to be more careful with money and looking after herself. She valued her independence but continued a strong relationship with her mother. By the end of the study she described her mother as 'my best friend. As long as I have my family I will be all right'. Jaz was given considerable help by her mother. She received food, money and stayed at least 3 nights a week. She maintained employment and the flat despite racial harassment by Asian young men, break-ins and vandalism. She maintained the flat because she wanted her independence but continued to stay with her mother regularly. Jaz did not think that care had hurt her and she regarded it as a 'phase'. She felt positive about herself and thought she was resilient and independent. 'I can do anything if I put my mind to it. I will show them'.

Family experiences

The other 2 women also felt excluded from their siblings and parents from an early age. They attributed these feelings to their parent/s problems of alcoholism and drugs and to competition with a sibling. 'We never got on. I was passed onto other people, she didn't care. She always went out and had boyfriends.' 'I was never part of the family. I didn't get any attention. I was different'. The literature on attachment theory described this as ambivalent attachment where the inconsistency of parental care leads to insecurity and anger. This is expressed in aggression by children, (Howe, 1995).

During adolescence members of the group began to react to being pushed out of the family. They identified closer with peer groups and entered what could be described as 'rebellious teenage behaviour'. It was directed at breaking family values and boundaries from the age of 13 or 14, such as staying out until the early hours of the morning, going clubbing, having boyfriends, drinking, school suspension and petty crime. This behaviour in effect isolated them further. It brought with it a more severe reaction from parent/s who either ignored them or tried to enforce boundaries through physical punishment,

grounding and arguments. In 2 cases there was evidence of truanting from school and running away to stay with mates for up to a few weeks. 'I had a lot of trouble with my dad picking on me. When I was on the run I was allowed to do anything I wanted to do. I thought it was exciting...I went clubbing and drinking and everything. I wanted to see how far I could push them'. The culmination of their behaviour, concerns by schools, running away and increased family conflict led to them being accommodated by social services. 2 out of 3 welcomed care as it also reinforced their view that they were not part of the family and not wanted.

Care experience

The young women expected to have more freedom in care. All members of the group were admitted to care as teenagers which was consistent with the experience of family conflict and challenging behaviour. All of them lived initially with foster carers but one moved into residential care after the disruption of the foster placement. Apart from Jaz, foster homes broke down when the young women continued to challenge rules and boundaries.

'She did my head in. I had to go to the Salvation Army on Sundays. I was only allowed out 3 times a week. She was used to little kids'.

One of them gave the impression that residential care meant more freedom than foster care. The continued identification with peers led to involvement in petty crime, running away for fun and little school attendance. 'I knew most of the lads in there. I had a laugh...We used to do mad things. We got on the roof lobbing tiles (playing) Strangeways'.

2 out of 3 women had contact with a member of their family.

Expectations of moving into independence

The members of the group looked forward to leaving care as providing freedom but unlike group D there was an awareness of the difficulties this would pose. 'Freedom, do what I want but you're on your own, money, finding a place to live, you have to stand on your own two feet'.

Transition to independent housing

Apart from Jaz, the other 2 young women were 16 years old when they moved into independence and both were placed in a hostel. There were differences in their abilities depending on whether and how their challenging behaviour continued.

One young woman moved into a shared house from where she was evicted, remanded to care and after 6 months was given her own tenancy at the age of 17. This and a subsequent tenancy were lost because of her friends' behaviour, ('the whole of the ... used to be on the run and stay with me') rent arrears and being broken into and furniture smashed by ex boyfriends (twice). She was then homeless and staying on a friend's floor for the next 6 months. 'I stay cause there's nowhere else'.

Another also moved into a hostel at 16 and challenged rules by having her boyfriend stay, small rent arrears, using drugs and arguing with other women. However, there was 24 hour cover at the hostel and she was never evicted, stopping just short in her behaviour. 'I just don't like it. Stupid rules'. She sustained her hostel place with the support of her grandmother and by being able to stay with friends.

Both became pregnant and were housed by the local authority after temporary housing and debts had been cleared. Without family support it was unlikely they would have sustained their housing and in one case would not have had access to another tenancy.

Becoming a parent

2 members of the group had become parents and Jaz was expecting a baby by the end of the study.

In addition to Jaz, the other 2 felt that becoming a parent would mean changing their behaviour. 'I can't be a dosser. I know that I've got to do something. I've got to bring up this baby...I've had to look after myself, eat properly'. 'It will make me grow up more...'

Transition to employment and education

The 2 remaining women dropped out of school continuing to go out with friends. Jobs were lost because they did not like the job and continued seeing friends rather than completing training courses. The result was financial hardship without work which was mitigated by support from families or partners. After becoming a parent the 2 other women did not plan to work in the short term. All of them wanted to acquire further qualifications in order to offer their children a better future. Thus by the end of the study all 3 had aspirations for employment and themselves.

Support Network

Bullock et al (1993) paid particular attention to the role of family relationships and contact. The authors argued that outcomes were better if the assessment of the relationships was positive and young people felt they belonged 'home' and were accepted there. After moving into independence all members of the group received extensive support from members of their family. In 2 cases this related to mothers and fathers in one case a grandmother as there was no contact with her mother, who had abandoned her.

Families helped with practical things like money, food, cigarettes. The closeness of relationships was expressed by the reliance on their families. 'My parents help a lot. They have her, mum calms me down...they pay my rent arrears off. If I'm really stuck I can lend off them'. Relationships were described much more positively than in group A and there was less evidence of conflict. Mothers were describes as 'friends'. 'They are fantastic'. 'If it wasn't for my gran I wouldn't have anything'.

The support enabled the women to maintain their housing situation.

They did not experience the same trauma as abuse victims and could see their part in the conflict during adolescence, as well as changes in their parents. The possibility of re-establishing positive relationships shows the limitations of attachment theory. According to Bowlby and others relationships are permanently impaired. However, the evidence by the young women demonstrated that, depending on circumstances, new attachments and relationships can be formed.

This group had strongly associated with mates and friends in adolescence. All 3 spoke of friends but mainly as 'mates to go out with' and these were not the same mates as in adolescence. Friendships were not as strong as they had been during adolescence. As they had to be independent at a much earlier age than their friends, they had less in common.

Partners were important but not in the same way as families. Partners were there for 'fun, a laugh, to go out with'. Possibly because the family provided help and support, they did not require partners to fulfil the same role.

Taking responsibility and decision making

As long as the young women challenged rules and boundaries by going out, clubbing and petty crime they did not consider the consequences of their actions. This changed for all of them when they either had a tenancy or became pregnant. They, then, felt responsible for themselves and their actions and for maintaining their accommodation. It seemed that through new responsibilities in their lives they gained an insight into their behaviour and earlier actions, and learned from these.

Self Esteem

There was little evidence of a poor self image. Instead they had plans for the future and for themselves.

They saw themselves as 'tough' which was related to their challenging behaviour earlier. Given the amount of conflict and changes they experienced, they regarded themselves as independent and resilient rather than victims.

'You have to be tough and stand on your own two feet, I'll sort it myself'.

In conclusion, earlier difficulties and behaviour were seen as a phase and part of growing up. Being in care and homelessness were also seen as phases rather than having created personal problems. The group was therefore described as 'settlers'. Little (1995) found that young people from fragmented families who left the therapeutic community early had the poorest outcomes in the areas of homelessness and petty crime. His sample referred mainly to men and there was no evidence of parental contact and support. This could underline the importance of this help for the young women here. It is unlikely that they would have achieved such changes without the support of their families.

Group D: Young Women with Challenging Behaviour' - Problematic Transition to Adulthood - Challenger

There were 5 members of group D: Linda, Pat, Tanja, Nancy, Holly

Case study

Holly's father died when she was 6. Her mother re-married 3 years later and Holly did not get on with her step father. Once her younger sister was born she felt pushed out of the family. As a teenager, Holly increasingly challenged her mother's rules by going out, night clubbing and having boyfriends. 'I was such a rebel. I went out drinking and night clubbing'. Shortly before her 16th birthday her mother asked for her to go into voluntary care. Holly was shocked. 'ah, you know she's joking. She won't do it. I'm mummy's little girl. But she did. I then had to pack my stuff and she stood there while I did it'. Holly stayed in 2 emergency placements before moving to supported lodgings registered with the Social Services Department. The placement broke down when Holly continued to go out clubbing and did not go to work. As she was then 17 years old, her social worker placed her in a local hostel.

Then social work ceased as the worker moved away and the case was not re-allocated. Holly did not get on with many of the other women residents. She lost various youth training placements because she did not turn up for work. Living on suspended benefit led to debts and rent arrears. Rent arrears and conflict with other residents led to her eviction after 12 months. During the following 12 months this pattern continued. Holly moved through a succession of hostels eventually ending up in an emergency hostel followed by another short term hostel by the end of the study. She had been repeatedly evicted because of conflict with other residents, rent arrears, getting into fights and breaking hostel rules. Her mother split up from her step father when Holly was 18 and Holly got on well with her mother since then. By the end of the study Holly was feeling low. She had lost 2 stone in weight. 'I get depressed. Just fed up of living. I haven't got the foggiest idea of what to do. I wanna have a nice job, nice care, nice boyfriend and a house and no debts'.

Family Experience

The women grew up with either one or both parents. They did not comment in detail on their childhood but identified feeling different when parents separated and a step father joined the family. They also believed that they did not live up to their parents' expectations. This led to being an outsider within the family. 'Mum picked on me, didn't get on with her'.

Like the women in group C they began to react to being an outsider by rebelling against the family rules and boundaries, which led to closer identification with peer groups and boyfriends. They described night clubbing, running away to have fun, going drinking and some small petty crime as well as non school attendance. 'I did what I wanted. I'd go crazy, drugs, alcohol, stayed with friends'.

This behaviour continued for a period of months until parent/s finally asked for them to be received into voluntary care.

Care experience

All members of the group were admitted to care as teenagers. Like the women in group C, they expected being in care to free them from parental control. Initially they were placed with foster families but one of them moved into residential care because she did not want to live with another family.

It was typical for this group that foster parents were not seen as 'mum and dad'. Contact with families was maintained.

The group experienced foster home breakdowns usually due to their behaviour. They challenged rules over coming in and education or training. They had on average 3 to 4 placements in 2 to 3 years. There was no evidence that they were able to negotiate rules and behaviour with foster carers. There was such escalating behaviour by the young women that foster care could no better contain them than their families. 'I never gave them a chance...I had a fight with their daughter. I punched her.' '(I) ran away a few times, they were too strict, treated me like a child'.

The woman living in residential care had only one placement. There were problems with school attendance and other young people but she also felt that staff were more used to negotiating with young people and reaching agreement. 'It was all right. They give you more freedom and things like that'.

They did not necessarily associate moving with insecurity. 'It doesn't bother me moving around'. I didn't mind moving, I wanted to'.

Expectations of moving into independence

Given that the group wanted to be in care to have more freedom, leaving care and moving into independence was also seen as finally giving them the freedom they had been seeking. There was much less anticipation of the difficulties they would face, in contrast to women in group A and C. 'You can do what you want to as long as it doesn't annoy others. You won't have people telling you what to do'. 'My own life, my own freedom, doing things I want to do'.

Transition to independent housing

The majority of moves into independence were unplanned. 2 women were 18 years old, 2 were 17 and 1 was 16 years old.

They struggled with the demands and responsibilities of leaving care and moving into independence because they struggled with the conflict between responsibility and freedom. This conflict was acted out in different ways but showed strong similarities with their earlier challenging behaviour.

2 moved into their own tenancies because they were caring for their children. One woman moved home after living in supported lodgings. One woman moved in with her boyfriend and his sister's family and one woman moved to a hostel. Over the next year 3 out of 5 moved numerous times because of arrears, debts, breakdowns in relationships and physical fights leading to evictions and homelessness. As long as the group wanted freedom without the responsibilities they had difficulty maintaining housing. Some used moving or going away for a period of time as strategies for coping with difficult situations, like imminent evictions and debts, but this did not prevent either. Rather than negotiate with landlords and accommodation providers, they left. By the final interview 2 women had moved home to avoid homelessness. 2 young women in tenancies were in danger of being evicted because of rent arrears, debts with fuel companies, drugs and raves. Holly remained in a temporary hostel.

Transition to employment and education

None of the women in this group gained any GCSE qualifications. 2 attended school irregularly after their 15th birthday and did not finish school. 3 attended special educational provision either for learning difficulties or non school attendance. 3 cared for their children and did not enter employment. The remaining 2 had youth training placements in catering and administration but these lasted only a few weeks. They became unemployed.

All members of the group lived on Income Support and one of them had her benefit suspended after losing her YT placement. Living on Income Support was difficult for these women and they accumulated rent arrears and debts. This was exacerbated by debts due to drugs and parties. Most said that once they ran out of money, they had to wait until their next giro arrived.

Becoming a parent

3 out of 5 women became pregnant whilst they were in care. 2 were 16 and one woman was 17 when their children were born. While they were in care the first difficulties in caring for their children emerged. They had to reconcile their own needs for freedom and fun with the needs of the baby. 2 of them continued to live in foster care once the child was born. Foster placements came under increasing pressure when foster carers were seen as interfering. 'She interfered over the baby, told me what to do, when to come in'. In the end the young woman left the foster home unplanned and moved to her boyfriend's family. Another young woman remained in foster care for 2 years after both her children were born.

Unlike the women in group A and C becoming a parent did not change their behaviour. This was possibly because they became mothers earlier and had not been able to act out their wish for freedom and fun like group C. 2 out of 3 had serious problems and social work involvement. One child was on the At Risk Register and 2 children were in care at the end of the study.

Support Network

Family support varied and it was not as positive as for the women in group C. The reasons for changes in support were strongly related to the quality of the relationship with their families. If relationships with parent/s were good then the young women received money, help with child care, cigarettes and were able to stay for weekends or Christmas. In those situations mothers in particular were described as helpful. 'If I have any problems I can talk to her'. 'My mum is my mum. I love my mum.

If I have a problem I go and see her'. Relationships deteriorated when parent/s felt that the young women were not taking responsibility.

This group spoke of friends but it was mainly mates to go out with. Mates caused problems with parties, drugs and fights.

The group seemed unable to control their friend's behaviour or foresee problems. There were rapid changes in friendships and none of the them had the same friends at any interview. Usually relationships had broken down when 'she stabbed me in the back, shit stirring' which usually meant that there had been an argument and a fight over 'who had said what, to whom'.

None of the women had long term relationships (over 12 months) with partners. None of the fathers of their children had any contact with their children after they were born. 2 women went to live with their boyfriend or their boyfriend's family. Both relationships ended, in one case because he was violent.

The young women had hardly any contact with social workers after they moved into independence. If social workers were involved it was felt that this was mainly to monitor their ability to care for their child.

Taking responsibility and decision making skills

The group did not show evidence of coping with responsibility for their housing, employment or children. They did not modify their behaviour in response to changed circumstances. When moving in crisis they could not foresee any difficulties. When making decisions about leaving their accommodation, they did not think where they would move to next. They did not consider the implications of giving up work, having their benefit suspended and getting into rent arrears. It is possible that they did not learn decision making skills and taking responsibility because they had moved frequently since going into care.

Self Esteem

Whilst the women in group C regarded themselves as resilient, this group did not give any indication of feeling this way. This was possibly due to the fact that they were struggling with housing, income and child care. The cause for their low self esteem was located within their families. 'I'm insecure. I needed love and attention. I should have been more responsible'. 'I could become an alcoholic'.

The remaining 3 in this group felt that they had changed and 'grown up' but there was no indication of what 'growing up' meant apart from 'keeping myself to myself' 'being quiet'. There was no indication that 'growing up' meant a change in behaviour. They continued to move and relationships broke down.

To conclude, Little (1995) had found that children from fragmented families who did not have stability in care had poor outcomes once they left care in the areas of homelessness and debts. Biehal et al (1995) also referred to the impact of family rejection and instability in care as a poor starting point. The concept of family rejection was not analysed in detail and it was unclear whether it referred to abuse or family conflict. This group experienced problems after moving into independence because their challenging behaviour continued. In addition, their weak position in the employment market led to low incomes and subsequent debts. The housing market did not provide permanent housing for the majority. The lack of consistent family support and their behaviour made them vulnerable to homelessness, debts and their children being admitted to care. The actual crisis of homelessness, debts and children in care was due to them wanting freedom, their lack of decision making skills, an inability to learn from earlier crises and not thinking through the consequences of their actions. In 3 cases learning difficulties could have contributed to poor decision making skills. It was likely that they would face further crises which weak parental support would not be able to prevent.

Chapter 6: Methodology for Part 2 Fieldwork

Introduction

I concluded that the typology could inform social work practice by highlighting the different needs of the young women for social work support. Furthermore, social policies had hindered the young women's access to housing, employment and undermined their income management.

The next question was whether the typology would stand up when tested on a wider sample, or at least be recognisable to other professionals in the field. The option of testing the typology by contacting more young women direct was rejected, following the earlier experience. There would have been insufficient time to achieve a reasonable size in the remainder of the PhD period. So I decided to investigate how far the typology was recognisable to a sample of social work professionals

Research questions

I developed the following research questions.

1. Did social workers acknowledge a link between care experience and managing the transition to adulthood?
2. Were social workers able to recognise each group within the typology as distinctive?
3. Did the social work preparation for leaving care and after care support differ between the members of the 4 groups of the typology?
4. Were social work practitioners aware of the impact of social policies on care leavers and, if so, did they feel able to mitigate the adverse effects.?

The sample

The sample were social workers and other professionals who were or had been working with young women leaving care.

I aimed for a sample of workers in different local authorities working in children's teams, fostering teams and leaving care teams. All worked regularly with care leavers and, although fostering workers didn't have case work responsibility for children and young people, they were involved in planning and supporting placements. They had knowledge through foster parents and other social workers of the issues involved and the subsequent experiences of young women.

I also aimed to involve a number of workers in voluntary organisations working with care leavers. Biehal et al (1995) and Stone (1990) reported the large increase in voluntary organisations providing after care support. Often project were working with care leavers for a number of years. My work at the Young Homeless Project had shown that young people often kept in touch with the project after they had moved into independence successfully. I hoped that other projects had a similar experience and that the all 4 groups of the typology could be tested. My ongoing professional contact with foster carers and fostering teams suggested that some young people remain in contact with carers after independence, a point also made by Fry (1992). I, therefore, decided to include foster carers.

Through my work as project manager of the Young Homeless Project and Chair of the Young Homelessness Group I was in contact with social workers in local authorities, national and local voluntary organisations working with care leavers and some foster carers. This national network ensured a wide range of organisations and avoided any particular bias to one local authority or team. The fieldwork needed to be completed by December 1996. The data had to be analysed and the PhD had to be completed in November 1997. Given the time constraints involved I decided to limit the sample to teams and workers I was already in contact with or known to, to ensure the success of this approach. I identified 18 different organisations and individuals who were contacted to participate in the fieldwork.

This included 7 local authorities, 6 national voluntary child care organisations, 4 local youth homelessness organisation and 1 individual foster carer.

There were also a number of sampling issues to consider. Workers were more likely to have had contact with care leavers whose transition to adulthood had been difficult and who relied on social work support. I needed workers who had contact with young women who had successfully managed the transition. I tried to achieve this in the way I identified the sample. I identified leaving care teams, specialist accommodation projects, social workers and foster carers. Based on my knowledge of working with foster carers, I felt that they would be most likely to be in touch with women who did not have social work involvement but where a placement had ended in a planned way. Also there was potential memory bias. Workers might know, or remember less of the care history of the young woman than the leaving care history because they would be concentrating on the future rather than past events. Finally, 6 out of 12 young women in the initial study did not disclose the abuse whilst they were in care. There was likely to be less knowledge of this among workers.

Research tool

I was looking to validate the typology and therefore as large a sample as possible was desirable. I opted for a structured mail questionnaire. The advantage of the questionnaire was that a wide sample of workers would be able to complete the questionnaire in relatively short time. If I was able to construct the questions adequately, it would also enable me to ask a large number of questions covering all aspects of the typology.

To ground the study, I decided to ask workers to derive their answers from their experience of specific cases.

The questions would need to be very specific. (Moser and Kalton, 1971). Moser and Kalton (1971) also pointed out that respondents were more likely to answer sensitive questions as part of a mailed questionnaire and this was particularly relevant to the section which asked social workers about after care work.

Finally, questionnaires were a cost effective way of gathering information from a large number of people. Given the fact that this part of the research was planned late in the PhD, time and resources were a fact which had to be considered. I considered administering the questionnaire through telephone interviews to probe for further information or clarify statements. However, from earlier experience in the study I knew how difficult it was to set up phone conversations with busy professionals and eventually rejected the idea

Questionnaire design

The questions were based on one particular case which the worker was actually, or had recently been working with. This was to ensure easy completion without necessarily having to take recourse to case files. A detailed set of instructions clarified terms used in the questionnaire and gave details of how to complete the questions (see appendix E) All questions were pre-coded.

Questions 1 to 12 covered the care history of the young woman - the history of abuse, family conflict, age of admission to care, number of foster and residential placements, length, if any, of one stable placement, the reasons for foster home and residential placement breakdowns and making compromises in foster care. Questions 13 - 16 asked workers to describe the move into independence, including the age and way the young woman moved and her first accommodation after moving into independence. Questions 17 - 22 asked about her housing history including homelessness. Questions 23 - 31 dealt with the young woman's children, if there were any, and her employment pattern. Questions 32 - 45 covered other aspects of the typology such as support networks, maintaining relationships, decision making skills and taking responsibility.

Questions 46 - 52 examined the preparation and after care work. The literature review examined the different models used in developing support systems for young people leaving care. The review outlined several theoretical models on which preparation and after care services were based on, such as the fieldwork approach, the independence approach and the specialist team approach. Biehal et al (1995) examined the work of different leaving care projects in more detail.

The authors found that there were significant differences between projects. In some cases projects worked explicitly within one theoretical framework, others used a range of methods from different perspectives and in some projects or teams the theoretical perspective was implicit rather than explicit. In reality services were often based on a continuum from the fieldwork to therapeutic approach and 'worker led' to 'young person led' approach. Given such different perspectives and emphasis in working with young people the questions tried to elicit which perspective was used in relation to which young person.

The final set of questions from 53 - 55 briefly examined the impact of the young woman's behaviour and social policies on after care work. The literature review outlined the range of government policies which impacted on young people's transition to adulthood. I concentrated on housing and social security in the questionnaire. I would have liked to examine the impact of specific social policies on social security, housing and employment in more detail.

I decided to concentrate on those areas of social policy because the literature and the Initial longitudinal study demonstrated that those areas had a major impact on young women's lives.

The questionnaire deliberately disaggregated the dimensions of the typologies to avoid workers realising what was being tested in the early parts of the schedule. The questions tested the relationships implicit within each typology without showing the full picture. As a cross-check, Question 56 briefly described each of the 4 groups of the typology. Workers were asked to judge which one of those groups best matched the young woman they had been describing in the previous 55 questions.

Terminology

The first part of the PhD used the earlier phrase 'in care' as this was used by the young women. However, by this time professionals were using the term 'looked after' in policies, (Warwickshire Social Services Department, 1993) and publications, for example the Community Care magazine.

As the questionnaire included workers in the statutory sector I decided to use the phrase 'looked after' to refer to those on care orders and accommodated by the social services department.

Pilot

A pilot was undertaken on 5 social workers and workers in the voluntary sector. All respondents were known to me personally. I mailed the questionnaire to each of them, asking them to read through all the questions and decide on one particular young woman they wished to base the answers on. This was important in order for them to think of whether they had all the relevant knowledge to be able to answer the questions. I then met with each person. This enabled me to investigate whether the questions were clearly understood and helped to clarify which phrases were ambiguous.

The respondents said that they appreciated having seen the questionnaire first. They felt that otherwise a full response would have been difficult given the level of knowledge which was required. They could answer the majority of questions only number of small changes and clarifications were made after those interviews, for example the addition of foster carers as offering support to the young woman. The workers commented that they needed to have good knowledge of the young woman and I decided to emphasise this point in the opening briefing paragraph. Each respondent later felt able to allocate the young woman they were describing to one of the 4 groups of the typology.

Fieldwork

I had listed a total of 18 organisations who I wanted to participate in the fieldwork. Before writing to each I phoned to establish whether they would be prepared to participate. This was useful as I could explain the project in more detail. Furthermore, I knew a number of this group personally and this may have helped in getting a positive response.

In October 1996 all 18 local authorities and organisations agreed to participate. In 3 local authorities Service Managers for Children supported the research and wrote to the relevant fieldwork teams working with care leavers to inform them of the project.

At the beginning of November 1996 I sent a letter to each of the 18 contact people outlining the research together with copies of the questionnaire and instructions for completion as well as stamped addressed envelopes.

In total 190 questionnaires were sent out, so that the contact people in local authorities and national organisations would not need to copy the questionnaire. In the case of national organisations, the questionnaires were sent to the head office who distributed the those to the relevant projects. In 3 local authorities team managers organised the distribution and completion. In one local authority I sent copies to each individual children's team. Local projects had one named contact person. 14 days after the initial mailing I sent a follow up letter reminding each contact of the questionnaire and setting a return date of late December 1996.

By January 1997 I had received 64 questionnaires. This represented 30% of all mailed questionnaires, and was typical of mailed surveys, (Oppenheim, 1966). Furthermore, I had sent on average 10 copies to each of the contact people knowing that small organisations and teams were unlikely to complete such a number. 15 of the 18 organisations and local authorities responded. Returns were made by 6 national children's and young people's organisations, 7 local authorities with a total of 11 child care teams represented, one local voluntary organisation and one individual foster carer. Among the respondents were 41 responses from workers in specialist leaving care teams and services and 8 foster carers. I was not surprised by the high rate of responses from leaving care services as the literature had shown that they were most likely to stay in contact with care leavers. Social workers in local authority children's teams found it most difficult to complete the questionnaire. 15 out of 64 responses were from them. I had phone calls from 4 social workers and team managers in local authorities apologising for not being able to return questionnaires because they did not know what had happened to any of the young women leaving care in their area. They were all from the same local authority. As one social worker said 'Our services are non-existent. We don't know what happens when they leave'. 3 local organisations working with care leavers did not respond. In all 3 cases I did not know the contact person well and this may have contributed to the non-response.

Data analysis

A total of 64 completed questionnaires were returned. One questionnaire was only partly completed and could not be used. The remaining 63 formed the basis of the following analysis. All respondents had been asked to allocate the case they had been describing to 1 of the 4 groups of the typology. One respondent did not feel able to select an appropriate group. In this case the researcher made an allocation. The young woman was looked after because of family conflict and had one foster placement. She moved into independence at the age of 17 into stable accommodation.

She had stability for at least 2 years, was able to maintain relationships with others, had good decision making and independent living skills and was aware of the consequences of her actions. It was said that she settled after re-building relationships with her parents and that the major source of support was from her mother. Unfortunately, the respondent was unable to answer the questions about her self image and this made an allocation problematic. Nonetheless, there was enough information to make an allocation for group D of the typology (Challenger).

The questionnaires were firstly split into the 4 groups of the typology. There were 23 responses for group A - Survivor, 24 responses for group B - Victim, 12 responses for group C - Settler and 4 responses for group D - Challenger. The numbers in group B were too small to identify the Sub groups 1 and 2, particularly as the instructions had not been clear enough for the respondents to clearly indicate which Sub group the case was to be allocated to. The majority of respondents who ticked group B, did not tick a specific Sub group.

I had hoped to investigate whether workers used a specific model of after care work. However, there were not enough questions to distinguish between therapeutic and social action approaches and fieldwork and specialist approaches. Therefore, I decided not to pursue this particular line of investigation.

When analysing the data I was aware of the high proportion of specialist workers in the sample which probably accounted for the large number of specialist preparation sessions and the high level of support from professionals.

Chapter 7: Analysis of questionnaire

Introduction

There was support for the typology. 62 of the 63 respondents were able to match individual cases to individual groups. Overall, some characteristics varied slightly from that predicted from the typology. Among group B were some who wanted fun rather than responsibility and the number of cases of challenging behaviour were higher than expected.

Detailed findings of each group and comparison

There were 23 in group A, 24 in B, 12 in C, and 4 in D.

Ethnicity of the sample Table 10.1

	A	B	C	D	Total
Caucasian	11	13	9	2	35
African/Caribbean	-	2	2	-	4
Asian	-	-	1	-	1
Mixed heritage	1	3	-	-	4
Don't know	11	6	-	2	19
Total	23	24	12	4	63

The large number of 'don't knows' was possibly due to the location of this question at the end of the questionnaire. The majority of the sample were of White/European origin with only 5 young women from minority ethnic groups.

Being looked after

Age at the last admission to care Table 10.2

	A	B	C	D	Total
0 - 10	2	3	0	0	5
11 - 13	6	13	5	2	26
14 - 17	13	7	7	2	29
Total	21	23	12	4	60*

As predicted, all the young women in the 4 groups were most likely to be admitted to care as teenagers, especially those in C and D.

Reasons for being looked after Table 10.3

	A and B	C and D	Total
Physical and/or sexual abuse	24	3	27
Family conflict/ challenging behaviour	16	11	27
Neglect/illness/death of a parent	7	2	9
Total	47	16	63

To test the typology prediction, Groups A and B were grouped, and C and D were grouped. The prediction was that A and B would be more likely to be looked after because of abuse whilst groups C and D were more likely to be looked after because of family conflict. The prediction was confirmed ($p<0.01$).

Number of foster placements Table 10.4.1

	A	B	C	D	Total
0	6	5	1	2	14
1	6	5	4	1	16
2 - 4	10	8	6	1	25
5 - 10	-	5	1	-	6
Total	23	24	12	4	61

Table 10.4.2

	A, C and D	B	Total
0	9	5	14
1	11	5	16
2 - 4	17	8	25
5 - 10	1	5	6
Total	38	23	61

The prediction was that group B would have a significantly higher number of foster placements and this was confirmed ($p<0.01$).

Number of residential placements Table 10.5

	A, C and D	B	Total
0	20	5	25
1	10	7	17
2 - 4	9	11	20
Total	39	23	62

There were significantly more residential placements among this sample than among the earlier sample. This could have been due to the differences in local authority policies to provide residential placements for teenagers in the areas where the respondents were working. Group B was analysed separately and compared to the others because it was suspected that, given their high number of foster placements, this group would also have more residential placements than the other groups. The analysis showed that group B had a significantly higher number of residential placements ($p<0.05$) than the others.

Length of a single placement during adolescence Table 10.6

	A and C	B and D	Total
Less than 2 years	15	18	33
More than 2 years	20	8	28
Total	35	26	61

The typology suggested that groups A and C would experience significantly greater stability between the ages of 14 and 17, and this was confirmed ($p<0.05$).

Learning to make compromises in foster care Table 10.7

Compromises in foster care	A	B, C and D	Total
Learned to make compromises	14	20	34
Didn't learn to make compromises	1	10	11
Total	15	30	45

The typology suggested that members of group A had significantly greater skills in making compromises which might have been learned in foster care. This was confirmed $p<0.01$.

Reasons for placement breakdowns Table 10.8

Placement breakdown	A	B	C	D	Total
Breaking rules	3	12	4	3	22
Relationship breakdown	5	7	6	-	18
Wanting independence	1	7	2	-	10
Challenging behaviour	-	15	4	6	25
Total	9	41	16	9	75

The typology suggested that group B were most likely to end placements because of a breakdown in relationships, challenging behaviour or wanting independence. Group C and D were likely to experience placement breakdowns because of challenging behaviour, breaking rules and wanting independence. The picture from this table was less clear, as group B's and C's placements ended for very similar reasons. Members of group B displayed more challenging behaviour and wanting independence than expected. It is possible that group B would need to be further divided into Sub groups, using a larger sample base, as the typology suggested.

The process of moving into independence

Age at moving into independence Table 10.9.1

	A	B, C and D	Total
16	4	21	25
17	9	12	21
18+	10	7	17
Total	23	40	63

The prediction that group A would move into independence later than members of the remaining groups was confirmed ($p<0.01$). However, group B was found more likely to move into independence at the age of 16 than members of group C and D ($p<0.05$). This was not consistent with the typology which suggested that members of group C and D were the youngest moving into independence. This either suggests reconsideration of the importance of the factor, or suggests the importance of sub-groups with B.

Table 10.9.2

	B	C and D	Total
16	14	7	25
17	5	7	21
18+	5	2	17
Total	23	16	63

Social work plan to move into independence Table 10.10

	A	B, C and D	Total
Planned move	19	21	40
Unplanned move	4	18	22
Total	23	39	62

The above table confirms the prediction that group A was more likely to move into independence in a planned way. ($p<0.01$).

Awareness of difficulties when moving into independence Table 10.11

	A and C	B and D	Total
Awareness of difficulties	15	2	17
No awareness of difficulties	20	26	46
Total	35	28	63

As predicted, group A and C proved more likely to be aware of the difficulties when moving into independence than the other two ($p<0.01$).

The transition to independent housing

First independent placement Table 10.12

	A	B	C	D	Total
Local authority, Housing Association tenancy	6	1	4	1	12
Private rented tenancy	4	4	1	-	9
Lodgings	3	3	-	-	6
Parental home	-	-	1	-	1
Other family member	-	1	-	-	1
Friend's floor	1	-	-	-	1
Hostel, shared supported housing	6	3	3	1	13
Specialist scheme for young people	2	6	1	2	11
B&B	-	1	1	-	2
Sleeping rough	-	1	-	-	1
Other, including tied accommodation, psychiatric hostel	1	1	-	-	2
Total	23	24	2	4	63

Table 10.13.1

Housing	A	B	C	D	Total
Secure housing	13	9	6	1	29
Insecure housing	10	15	6	3	34
Total	23	24	12	2	63

Insecure housing was defined as staying with friends, in hostels, specialist schemes for young people, Bed and Breakfast establishments and sleeping rough. Both the tied accommodation and the psychiatric hostel were also likely to be temporary stays.

Table 10.13.2

Housing	A	B, C and D	Total
Secure housing	13	16	29
Insecure housing	10	24	34
Total	23	40	63

The typology predicted that members of group A would be more likely to move into secure housing. The table supports the direction of the prediction, but the difference was not found to be significant. It is possible that the number of responses from specialist projects offering temporary accommodation for care leavers influenced the outcome of the analysis by reporting high levels of temporary housing.

Number of moves during the first 18 months of living independently

Table 10.14

	A	B, C, D	Total
0 - 1	11	8	19
2-3	3	8	11
4+	-	12	12
Total	14	28	42

The prediction that group A would have the fewest moves after moving into independence was confirmed ($p<0.01$).

Reasons for changing first accommodation Table 10.15

	A	B	C	D	Total
Eviction because of rent arrears	-	2	-	-	2
Eviction because of own/friend's behaviour	-	2	1	1	4
Could no longer afford accommodation	1	1	-	-	2
Relationship breakdown with those sharing	1	5	3	-	9
Wanted better housing	3	5	-	1	9
Young woman wanted to run away rather than face problems	-	3	2	-	5
Leaving care legally	2	-	-	-	2
Cohabitation	3	-	-	-	3
Discharge from hospital	-	1	-	-	1
Successful move on	2	1	-	-	3
University	1	-	-	-	1
Emergency stay only	-	1	-	-	1
Other, including loneliness, travelling	1	-	1	-	2
Total	14	21	7	2	44

Although group A had a higher rate of moving than anticipated, their moves were mainly to gain better housing, to move in with partners and go to university. The members of group B were most likely to move because of evictions, relationship breakdowns and wanting to avoid problems. All the moves in group C were due to evictions and relationship breakdowns. This suggested that group C had not yet settled in permanent housing.

There were a total of 176 known accommodation stays for the 63 young women averaging 2.8 per person. This is lower than the longitudinal study.

However, the earlier study was likely to be more accurate as it followed the progress of the sample over 18 months. In the case of the questionnaire the information was based on workers memory and knowledge and could have been an under-estimation. If staying on a friend's floor, with a boyfriend, in a B&B and sleeping rough are taken as the most insecure form of housing, then group B experienced the highest rate of insecurity of tenure (49 stays out of 91). The young women in group B accounted for the highest number of placements with an average of 3.8 per person compared to 1.9 in group A and 2.5 in group C.

All known forms of housing stayed in Table 10.16

	A	B	C	D	Total
Local authority, Housing Association tenancy	11	15	8	3	37
Private rented tenancy	6	9	4	-	19
Lodgings	5	7	-	1	13
Parental home	-	5	1	-	6
Other family member	-	1	1	-	2
Ex Foster Carer	4	5	3	-	12
Boyfriend, boyfriend's family	3	9	2	1	15
Friend's floor	1	10	1	-	12
Hostel, shared supported housing	6	8	2	1	17
Specialist scheme for young people	5	8	3	3	19
B&B	1	5	4	1	11
Sleeping rough	1	7	1	1	10
Other, including tied accommodation, psychiatric hostel	1	2	-	-	3
Total	44	91	30	11	176

Reasons for changing accommodation after moving into independence

Table 10.17

Factors leading to moving	A	B, C, D	Total
Structural factors	5	8	13
Personal factors	7	60	67
Total	12	68	80

Up to 3 answers were possible increasing the total of all responses to 80.

Structural factors included the accommodation becoming too expensive and the lack of tenure in the private rented sector. Personal factors were the young women’s challenging behaviour, wanting to leave rather than face problems, relationship breakdown with others and the lack of stable support systems. The answers were given by a total of 57 respondents. Groups B, C and D were analysed together because it was expected that personal factors would feature strongly. The analysis supported this as groups B, C and D were significantly more likely to move because of personal factors ($p<0.01$).

Type of housing 18 months after moving into independence Table 10.18

	A	B	C	D	Total
Local authority, Housing Association tenancy	9	9	8	1	27
Private rented tenancy, bedsit	3	-	1	-	4
Lodgings	2	-	-	-	2
Parental home	-	2	-	-	2
Ex Foster Carer	1	1	-	-	2
Boyfriend, boyfriend’s family	-	4	-	-	4
Friend’s floor	-	1	-	-	1
Hostel, shared					
supported housing	4	2	-	-	6
Specialist scheme for young people	2	2	2	1	7
B&B	-	1	1	-	2
Sleeping rough	-	-	-	1	1
Other, including tied accommodation, psychiatric hostel , mother & Baby hostel	1	2	-	-	3
Don’t know	1	-	-	1	2
Total	23	24	12	4	63

Security of housing after 18 months Table 10.19

	A and C	B and D	Total
Secure housing	24	13	37
Insecure housing	10	14	24
Total	34	27	61

The typology anticipated that groups A and C would be more likely to be in secure housing 18 months after moving into independence, and this was confirmed ($p<0.05$).

Homelessness

The questionnaire did not ask the respondents whether the young woman had become homeless. The following figures are based on the types of housing each woman stayed in.

Level of homelessness Table 10.20

	A	B, C and D	Total
Homeless	9	25	34
Not homeless	14	15	29
Total	23	40	63

The typology suggested that group A was least likely to experience homelessness and this was confirmed ($p<0.05$) The definition of homeless used was 'living in accommodation which is insecure in tenure and potentially unsafe in terms of health and safety such as sleeping rough, sleeping on a friend's floor, unplanned temporary stays with friends, Bed & Breakfast, hostels, nightshelters and temporary specialist projects'.

Overall stability of housing during the first 18 months of moving into independence Table 10.21

	A	B	C	D	Total
Predominantly secure in tenure and safety	18	6	8	3	35
Predominantly insecure in tenure and safety	1	11	4	1	17
Insecure but becoming secure in tenure and safety	3	2	-	-	5
Secure but becoming insecure in tenure and safety	1	3	-	-	4
Don't know	-	2	-	-	2
Total	23	24	12	4	63

The typology suggested that group A would have predominantly secure housing and the questionnaire supported this. Group C was expected to be characterised as predominantly secure or Insecure but becoming secure. The questionnaire results found that 8 members of group C had secure housing but 4 members of group C remained in insecure housing. This is higher than anticipated. It was not clear from the questionnaires why this was the case. Group B was expected to be in predominantly insecure housing or secure and becoming insecure. Although half the group was said to be in insecure housing, the remainder was spread among the categories.

Becoming a Parent Table 10.22

Child Care	A and C	B and D	Total
On protection register	2	7	9
Not on protection register	11	9	20
Total	13	16	29

The prediction that groups B and D were more likely to have their children on the child protection register than A and C was confirmed ($p<0.05$).

Transition to employment and training

Educational qualifications Table 10.23

	A	B	C	D	Total
None	6	14	7	2	29
GCSE > 3	9	8	2	1	20
Higher than 4 GCSE	7	-	3	-	10
Don't know	1	2	-	1	4
Total	23	24	12	4	63

As predicted, those in group A had the highest level of qualifications which in turn would be more likely to lead to a successful employment career.

Final employment status by the age of 19 Table 10.24

	A and C	B and D	Total
Employed	11	5	16
Student/Trainee	4	1	5
Caring for a Child	9	7	16
Unemployed	6	14	20
Total	30	27	57

As predicted, Groups A and C were significantly less likely to be unemployed than groups B and D ($p < 0.01$). Respondents only gave one answer and the level of unemployment was compared with employment, training and caring for a child.

Support network

Sources of emotional support Table 10.25

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All
Mother	2	7	2	4	1	3	-	-	5	14
Father	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Other family	2	7	1	4	2	5	-	-	5	16
Partner	4	6	4	6	3	4	-	-	11	16
Social Worker	3	12	-	6	1	4	-	1	4	23
Specialist Worker	3	8	7	11	-	3	4	4	14	26
Ex Foster Carer	4	11	4	8	3	10	-	-	11	29
Friends	3	11	2	13	2	4	-	2	7	30
Nobody	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	2
Hostel Worker	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Don't know	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	2
Total	23	66	24	56	12	33	4	7	63	162

Respondents were asked to rank all answers in response to this question. 'First choice' refers to the answer ranked as first. 'All' refers to all answers given.

Sources of material support Table 10.26

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1 st Choice	All	1st Choice	All
Mother	1	5	-	3	-	3	-	1	1	12
Father	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Other family	-	1	-	2	1	3	-	-	1	6
Partner	3	5	4	6	4	4	-	-	11	15
Social Worker	4	8	4	12	2	6	1	2	11	28
Specialist Worker	4	8	11	13	1	3	2	3	18	27
Ex Foster Carer	3	5	3	7	3	4	-	-	9	16
Friends	2	3	-	7	1	1	-	2	3	13
Nobody	4	4	2	2	-	-	1	1	7	7
Hostel Worker	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Total	23	44	24	52	12	24	4	9	63	129

Respondents were asked to rank all answers in response to this question. 'First choice' refers to the answer ranked as first. 'All' refers to all answers given.

There was a high level of professional support from social workers and specialist leaving care workers. Professional support was overall higher than anticipated, but may reflect favourable self-reporting by the respondents. This point is also true of foster carers who also accounted for a number of responses. There was less reported support from parents and particularly fathers for all groups than the earlier study had suggested. groups A and C had the highest level of family support. The level of family support for the women in group A was higher than the typology suggested. It is not clear why this was the case. There was little difference in support between groups A and B. Friends were not recorded as the first choice in providing emotional support indicating possibly variable friendship networks. This applied particularly to groups C where better networks would have been expected based on the typology.

There were fewer sources of material support than emotional support. In particular there was less evidence of material support from parent/s and other family members than reported in the typology. The level of material support from professionals was again higher than expected and could have been due to self-reporting. If professional support was taken out of the analysis, then the level of support for group B was limited and in line with the typology.

Biehal et al (1995) concluded that in some cases professional support could compensate for poor general support networks. More information about the nature of the support offered would have been required to reach such conclusions here. Group D also had a poor level of support except for professional support but as the analysis referred to only 4 cases it was not possible to draw conclusions from this.

Consistency of support Table 10.27

Support	A	B	C	D	Total
Consistent	17	12	8	2	39
On & off	5	8	3	2	18
Don't know	1	3	1	0	5
Total	23	23	12	4	62

For the majority in all groups the support was consistent and this could have been influenced by the high level of professional support.

Maintaining supportive relationships Table 10.28

Maintaining relationships	A and C	B and D	Total
Yes	26	12	38
No	4	14	18
Total	30	26	56

As predicted, groups A and C were significantly more likely to maintain relationships than group B and D (p<0.01).

Personal skills and abilities

Decision making skills

Accepting the consequences of actions taken Table 10.29

	A and C	B and D	Total
Always/mostly	18	1	19
Sometimes	10	18	28
Rarely/never	6	9	15
Total	34	28	62

The table confirms the prediction that groups A and C were more likely to accept the consequences of their actions than B and C ($p<0.01$).

Thinking of the consequences of your actions Table 10.30.1

	A and C	B and D	Total
Always/mostly	17	1	18
Sometimes	10	11	21
Rarely/never	8	15	23
Total	35	27	62

In further support, there was evidence that those in groups A and C were significantly more able to think of the consequences of their actions ($p<0.01$).

The typology predicted that the main differences between groups B and C were in the way the transition to independence was managed. When comparing B and C, group C was significantly more able to think of the consequences of actions ($p<0.01$).

Thinking of the consequences of your actions Table 10.30.2

	C	B	Total
Always/mostly	1	-	1
Sometimes	4	10	14
Rarely/never	7	13	20
Total	12	23	35

Being aware of the effect of decisions made Table 10.31.1

	A and C	B and D	Total
Always/mostly	18	3	21
Sometimes	17	16	33
Rarely/never	-	9	9
Total	35	28	63

The typology suggested that, overall, groups A and C would be more aware of the effect of their decisions and this was also supported ($p<0.01$). Comparing only groups B and C, group C was found to be significantly more aware of the effect of decisions than group B ($p<0.01$) suggesting that group C had more in common with group A than B, as the typology suggested.

Being aware of the effect of decisions made Table 10.31.2

	C	B	Total
Always/mostly	3	2	5
Sometimes	9	14	23
Rarely/never	-	8	8
Total	12	24	36

Self image Table 10.32

	A, C, D	B	Total
Feeling predominantly a victim	13	11	24
Wanting fun rather than responsibility	9	9	18
Neither category is appropriate	10	1	11
Don't know	7	3	10
Total	39	24	63

The typology had suggested that group B was significantly more likely to feel a victim than the others, and this was confirmed. ($p<0.05$). The typology also suggested that groups C and D wanted fun rather than responsibility, and this difference was also significant. ($p<0.05$).

Table 10.33

	A and B	C and D	Total
Feeling predominantly as a victim	19	5	24
Wanting fun rather than responsibility	11	7	18
Neither category is appropriate	9	2	11
Don't know	8	2	10
Total	47	16	63

The questionnaire should have included a category of 'neither applies' as this was written in by workers.

Table 10.34

Adolescence as teenage rebellion	A, B and D	C	Total
Yes	10	7	17
No	34	3	37
Don't know	6	2	8
Total	50	12	62

As predicted, group C was more likely to see their adolescence as a time of teenage rebellion than groups A, B and C ($p<0.01$).

Independent living skills Table 10.35

	A and C	B and D	Total
Good independent living skills enhanced by problems	25	7	32
Independent living skills not enhanced by problems	8	21	29
Don't know	2	-	2
Total	35	28	63

Also it was predicted that groups A and C would have significantly better independent living skills, and this was confirmed ($p<0.01$).

Evidence of change

The typology suggested that group C was more likely to settle after a change in their circumstances and this was confirmed. ($p<0.01$). However, there was also evidence of change among half the members of groups A and B which was not predicted. Unfortunately, there was not enough other information to know why this pattern emerged.

Evidence of change leading to becoming settled Table 10.36

Evidence of change	A, B and D	C	Total
Yes	24	12	36
No	27	-	27
Total	51	12	63

Nature of the change Table 10.37

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All
Full time employment	3	4	1	2	1	1	-	-	5	7
Becoming a parent	5	5	3	5	1	4	-	-	9	14
Holding a permanent, secure tenancy	1	6	1	4	3	3	-	-	5	13
Rebuilding relation- ships with parents	-	2	1	1	1	1	-	-	2	4
Support of partner	2	6	2	5	2	3	-	-	6	14
Returning to live with foster carers	-	1	2	2	1	1	-	-	1	4
Other	1	1	2	2	3	4	-	-	6	7
Total	12		12	21	12	17	0	0	36	63
	20									

Respondents were asked to rank all answers in response to this question. 'First choice' refers to the answer ranked as first. 'All' refers to all answers given.

The typology suggested that employment, becoming a parent and holding a tenancy were the main reasons for a change in behaviour because of the extra responsibilities each of those events brought with them. The significance of those events was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire. They were among the 4 main reasons given. In addition, the support of a partner also figured strongly. It was expected that rebuilding a relationship with parents might figure prominently in group C. This was not the case apart from one young woman. The support of a partner was expected to feature strongly in group A. Although it was mentioned by half the group, it wasn't the first choice given. Possibly partner's support may have been important in helping young women cope with the demands of employment, becoming a parent and holding a tenancy. More information would be required to confirm these conclusions.

Preparation for leaving care and after care support

Preparation

There was a higher level of preparation for leaving care than anticipated from the typology – again, possibly linked to self reporting. Only 5 members of group A and 7 of group B did not receive any preparation.

Table 10.38

Preparation for leaving care	A	B	C	D	Total
Yes	18	17	12	4	51
No	5	7	-	-	12
Total	23	24	12	4	63

Issues covered by workers Table 10.39

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All	1st Choice	All
Budgeting	3	12	3	13	3	9	2	4	11	38
Domestic Skills	4	7	2	11	-	7	-	3	6	28
Welfare Benefits	1	11	1	12	-	7	-	3	2	33
Housing Advice	2	11	-	10	2	7	-	2	4	30
Managing Relationships	1	8	2	11	3	9	1	3	7	31
Dealing with Personal Issues	1	8	1	11	-	10	-	1	2	30
Mental Health	-	5	2	8	-	2	-	1	2	16
Physical Health	-	2	-	10	-	4	-	1	-	17
Employment	1	8	-	6	-	5	-	4	1	23
Learn to Take Responsibility	2	10	5	13	3	12	1	2	11	37
Decision Making Skills	-	7	-	4	-	7	-	-	-	18
Building Self Esteem	3	11	1	7	1	9	-	-	5	27
Negotiation Skills	-	5	-	4	-	4	-	-	-	13
Education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Child Care	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No Specific Issues Addressed	5	5	7	7	-	-	-	-	12	12
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	23	110	24	127	12	92	24	63	63	353

Respondents were asked to rank all answers in response to this question.

'First choice' refers to the answer ranked as first. 'All' refers to all answers given.

For each young woman a considerable number of issues were addressed. From further analysis it seems to have been an individually tailored approach, rather than part of a package.

Table 10.40

Summary of preparation issues	A	B	C	D	Total
Practical/benefits	10	6	5	2	23
Relationships	1	2	3	1	7
Responsibility	2	5	3	1	11
Self Esteem	3	1	1	-	5
Other	2	3	-	-	5
Total	18	17	12	4	44*

*This table applied only to the first choice given by the sample

5 out of 23 in group A did not receive any preparation for leaving care. There were a number of reasons for this including work done by foster carers and young women leaving care unplanned. Foster carers who had done some work but not in depth were critical of the lack of preparation by the Social Services Department. For the remaining 18 members a variety of issues were addressed with a mixture of practical advice such as budgeting, welfare benefits and housing advice as well as issues, such as taking responsibility, relationships and negotiation skills.

The typology suggested that levels of self esteem in this group could be low and 11 out of 23 received help in building self esteem. Given that this group seemed to have good practical skills, a considerable amount of professional time was still spent on those issues. It is possible that either practical skills were not as good as anticipated or this work was part of an on- going programme. The simultaneous emphasis on emotional support and issue based work would seem to address the issues identified by the typology such as poor self esteem, building relationships and personal issues, which could include the effects of past abuse. There were 127 responses for group B. 7 of the 24 did not receive any preparation for leaving care despite their difficult transition to independence. 4 moved unplanned and in crisis, and in the remaining 3 cases no social worker was available to undertake the work.

There was an emphasis on practical skills such as budgeting, domestic skills and welfare benefits. Despite the young women's poor employment record, relatively little attention was given to employment issues. The typology suggested that group B found it difficult to carry responsibility for themselves and their actions. Work had been carried out on those issues. Health issues were also important for this group. However, there was little work on decision making and negotiation skills which had been highlighted as potential problems in the typology.

Group C had the highest level of preparation in terms of the number of issues covered with 92 for a group of 12. There was some work done on practical skills but a major emphasis was on taking responsibility, relationships, personal issues and self esteem. The typology suggested that taking responsibility was an issue for this group and the work done in preparation for leaving care seemed to confirm this. Low self esteem was not necessarily predicted from the the typology but was an issue which was addressed. Group D 's preparation concentrated on practical issues and employment. The typology suggested that negotiation and decision making skills could be problematic for this group but there was no evidence of work being completed. It is possible that the areas they found most difficult had not been addressed whilst they were looked after. However, the sample was so small that no conclusions could be reached.

Aftercare

Methods and sources of support Table 10.41

Source	A	B	C	D	Total
Specialist Workers	10	10	4	3	27
Fieldworkers	8	5	4	1	18
Foster carers	10	5	6	-	21
Sessional Worker	1	1	1	-	3
Total	29	21	15	4	69*

More than one answer was possible.

27 young women were supported by specialist workers and case workers undertook the work in 18 cases. It wasn't possible to assess specialist methods compared to fieldwork because detailed data was not collected. In addition, it wasn't possible to analyse any specific methods used by specialist after care workers for the same reasons. 21 foster carers undertook after care work. This point had not been raised in the longitudinal study.

Table 10.42

After care work	A and C	B and D	Total
Yes	20	23	43
No	15	5	20
Total	35	28	63

Groups A and C were expected to have a more successful transition to independence and therefore might have had less after care support. This assumption was confirmed ($p<0.01$).

In 23 cases the after care work was part of a key worker system by specialist workers. It is possible that field workers could have had less involvement in after care work as a number of local authority teams did not make returns to the questionnaire because of their lack of information about young women leaving care. 13 young women were offered counselling and this applied to seven members of group B. Given the level of sexual abuse those figures were comparatively low. Only 6 young women took part in group work, suggesting that the majority of the work was undertaken with individuals.

After Care issues covered Table 10.43

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st	All	1st	All	1st	All	1st	All	1st	All
Choice	Choice		Choice		Choice		Choice		Choice	
Budgeting	4	8	2	12	2	6	2	4	10	30
Domestic Skills	-	3	1	8	-	1	-	2	1	14
Welfare Benefits	3	7	1	10	3	5	-	1	7	23
Housing Advice	-	7	2	10	1	4	1	1	4	22
Managing Relationships	-	3	1	12	1	4	-	2	2	21
Dealing with Personal Issues	1	4	-	13	-	3	-	1	1	21
Mental Health	-	2	1	8	-	1	-	1	1	12
Physical Health	-	4	-	6	-	3	1	2	1	15
Employment	-	3	-	8	-	2	-	1	-	14
Learn to Take Responsibility	2	4	5	15	1	6	-	4	8	29
Decision Making Skills	-	3	-	5	-	3	-	2	-	13
Building Self Esteem	1	5	5	11	-	2	-	1	6	19
Negotiation Skills	-	2	-	3	-	3	-	1	-	9
Education	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Child Care	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	2
No Specific Issues Addressed	11	11	5	5	4	4	-	-	20	20
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	23	67	24	128	12	47	4	23	63	265

Respondents were asked to rank all answers in response to this question.

'First choice' refers to the answer ranked as first. 'All' refers to all answers given.

Fewer issues were addressed as part of the after care support. There was a concentration on practical issues rather than emotional support. The typology predicted that taking responsibility, maintaining relationships and levels of self esteem were weaknesses in group B and those issues were addressed. However, there was less emphasis than predicted on decision making and negotiation skills. It is unclear why there was such an emphasis on practical support.

It is possible that practical issues of dealing with money and benefits were forced to the forefront due to living in independent accommodation.

Constraints

45 respondents said that there had been difficulties in the after care work and this included nearly all of those in groups B, C and D. It was only in group A where 13 workers or carers out of 23 said that they experienced no difficulties (see Table 10.45, page 334).

Table 10.44

Constraints summary	A	B	C	D	Total
Structural factors	6	9	5	1	21
Personal factors	4	12	6	2	24
Total	10	21	11	3	45

Structural factors were defined as, for example, the lack of resources within social services departments, young women’s low income and the lack of affordable housing. Personal factors included the inability of the young women to take responsibility, frequent crisis leading to a chaotic lifestyle and their challenging behaviour led to problems. All groups were influenced by both set of factors and there were no significant differences among the groups ($p>0.05$). The importance of challenging behaviour, wanting to enjoy themselves and a chaotic lifestyle scored higher than anticipated within group B.

Overall, the questionnaire found that adversarial social policies hindered the transition to adulthood.

Constraints in After Care Work Table 10.45

	A		B		C		D		Total	
	1st	Choice	1st	Choice	1st	Choice	1st	Choice	1st	Choice
		All		All		All		All		All
Lack of worker's time	2	3	2	4	1	6	1	2	6	15
Lack of financial resources from SSD	4	5	3	9	2	6	-	-	9	20
Lack of affordable housing	-	3	2	3	-	1	-	-	2	7
Low income of young woman	-	2	-	5	2	4	-	2	2	13
Lack of employment options	-	2	-	4	-	2	-	-	-	8
Young woman's challenging behaviour	1	1	4	8	4	6	-	2	9	17
Young woman's chaotic lifestyle	-	2	2	12	-	3	-	2	2	19
Young woman unable to take Responsibility for her actions	-	3	4	11	2	4	1	3	7	21
Young woman wanting to enjoy herself rather than take responsibility	-	1	-	11	-	2	1	2	1	16
Lack of stable support systems	2	3	1	10	-	1	-	-	3	14
Left care unplanned with no contact	1	1	1	1	-	7	-	-	2	9
Lack of social services support	-	-	2	2	-	3	-	-	2	5
Low self esteem	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Mental health problems	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	10	27	21	81	11	46	3	13	45	167

Obtaining accommodation

27 workers experienced no difficulties in securing accommodation for the young women. The major issues causing problems were housing policy and the lack of appropriate stock. Workers commented in particular on the lack of affordable housing in the private sector and the lack of Income Support for under 18 year olds. In only 4 cases was a worker's lack of housing experience given as a reason.

Table 10.46

Securing accommodation	A	B	C	D	Total
No difficulties	11	10	5	2	28
Housing policy	5	14	7	1	27
Restriction of Income Support for under 18 year olds	2	1	3	1	7
Worker's inexperience in housing	-	3	1	-	4
Don't Know	3	2	1	1	7
Total	21	30	17	5	73*

*More than one response was possible.

To conclude, the questionnaire results did offer considerable support for the typology. Overall groups A and C provided the closest match. The merged group B did contain some elements of groups C and D. This may reinforce the case for defining sub-groups within B, or may be the beginning of a case for a new group between B and C. It would benefit from further exploration on a larger sample. Only few responses were made for group D and again a larger sample would need to test the characteristics of this group.

Due to the limited sample it was not possible to undertake further statistical analysis to identify risk factors which could be used by practitioners to identify those young women at risk of homelessness, unemployment, financial difficulties and child care problems. Further research and analysis with a sample of some 200 cases may produce risk factors. Social work intervention and appropriate social policies could then be developed to work on specific issues thus preventing or reducing the risk of homelessness, unemployment and financial and child care problems.

Chapter 8: Policy Implications and Recommendations

Homelessness and Housing

The existing housing policies hindered the transition to independent living for the 24 young women in the initial study. The narrow definition of priority groups under the Housing Act 1985 Part 3 did not take account of the needs of young people leaving care. In addition, the Children Act 1989 was not worded strongly enough to protect care leavers from homelessness. Furthermore, there was an inadequate range of supported accommodation available for care leavers reported in the longitudinal study and the questionnaire analysis.

The Housing Act 1985 Part 3 defined the responsibilities of local authorities towards homeless households. It was the intention of the legislation to ensure that certain groups of people would be provided with housing in an emergency. This included, for example, couples or lone parents with children, older people and those who were 'vulnerable because of any other reason'. The literature review had suggested that the majority of young single people and care leavers were not housed under the homelessness legislation.

The longitudinal study had also found that, among the 14 homeless young women, those without children were not housed under the homelessness legislation. 4 remained homeless at the final interview. All of them were single. The legislation defined vulnerable as 'at risk of financial and sexual exploitation'. These 4 could have been seen as vulnerable. 3 out of 4 had a history of sexual abuse. 3 out of 4 had been staying with a man they hardly knew to avoid sleeping rough. 2 had been sexually harassed. All 4 had moved frequently over the past 18 months and they had no financial means to rent in the private sector. 2 out of 4 had approached a housing department to be housed as homeless but were not assessed as in priority need. The questionnaire also found that the lack of access to council housing made it difficult to obtain housing and undermined after care work.

The introduction of the Housing Act 1996 was an opportunity to amend the homelessness legislation by adding care leavers as a specific group under the definition of 'vulnerable because of any other reason'. This point was argued by agencies such as the Children's Society and Barnardos as part of Action on Aftercare (1996) and pressure groups such as the Young Homelessness Group (1994) in a submissions to the Department of the Environment. However, the arguments of the Young Homelessness Group were rejected, as the government felt that not all care leavers were in need of housing. Furthermore, civil servants argued young people might want to be 'looked after' in order to be housed, (YHG 1995b).

The Children Act 1989 aimed to protect 16 and 17 year olds who are defined as 'in need'. 'In need' is further defined as 'if his development is likely to be impaired' or 'he is unlikely to achieve... a reasonable standard of health and development'. Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 local authorities are under a duty to provide accommodation for young people aged 16 to 17 'in need'. In those cases the social services department can request the assistance of the housing department under Section 27. The housing department is under a duty to respond 'as long as it does not conflict with any other statutory obligation'.

A report by National Voluntary Child Care Organisations (1995) found that homeless young people and particularly care leavers were not housed under the Children Act 1989 or the Housing Act 1985 because each department held the other responsible for the young person, a point also made by McCluskey (1993). In particular housing departments argued that the definition of 'in need' did not correspond with 'vulnerable' under the Housing Act 1985 Part 3. None of the young women in the longitudinal study were housed by social services under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 even when they were homeless and under 18. In one case a social worker referred a young women to a homelessness advice agency who then placed the young woman in an emergency hostel without any support.

During the passage of the Housing Bill through the House of Commons in 1996 the government was lobbied to introduce a joint definition of 'vulnerable' under the homelessness legislation and 'in need' under the Children Act 1989 (Action on Aftercare, 1996). However, this opportunity was not taken and it is likely that most care leavers will continue to fall between both pieces of legislation.

The government funds the development of special needs housing through the Housing Corporation which makes annual grants to housing associations and allocates funds to local authorities through the local authority housing association grant. Grants are allocated on the basis of local authority housing strategies which need to take account of the housing needs of people with special needs. Housing associations, often in partnership with voluntary organisations, have built a range of provision under this scheme, such as hostels and shared houses with peripatetic support.

Special needs housing provides housing with extra housing management support to enable people who have 'special needs' to live independently. 'Special needs' is not defined as any particular group but schemes for young homeless people, drug users and offender schemes have been funded on the basis that these groups may have few skills to manage to live independently. Extra housing management is defined as services which uphold the bricks and mortar of the property, for example visiting a tenant to ensure he/she pays their rent regularly, resolving disputes between tenants sharing a property and helping tenants make a claim for housing benefit (Young Homelessness Group, 1997b).

Housing associations who build special needs housing schemes such as hostels receive revenue funding to pay for the extra staffing costs involved. However, revenue funding is not available for anything defined as 'care and support' such as counselling, helping tenants with employment and training and emotional problems.

The longitudinal study demonstrated that some young women were unable to cope with the responsibility for an unsupported tenancy. They could not control their friends or pay bills and rent regularly.

7 out of 24 moved into special needs hostels but none of them received adequate support in managing relationships, dealing with conflict and finding employment to make the transition to independent housing successfully. The housing provision in the local area of the initial study and respondents to the questionnaire also highlighted the lack of a range of housing provision for young women leaving care.

Taking those criticisms, Floating Support Schemes have been promoted recently. The aim of the scheme is to place young people in self contained accommodation where the tenancy is held by a housing provider who also offers peripatetic support. Once the support worker and the tenant agree that he/she is ready to take on the tenancy without further support, the property is transferred into the young person's name. The support worker moves onto the next property. The advantage of the scheme is that young people have a permanent tenancy and the support moves rather than the young person ensuring the minimum disruption to the young person (Young Homeless Project 1995).

In addition to housing problems for 14 homeless young women, the longitudinal study had shown the link between leaving care and becoming unemployed. Foyers have been promoted as the answer to bridging the gap between housing and employment, (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). The provision is based on a French model whereby a large housing scheme with up to 100 bed spaces houses young people. Education and training opportunities are integrated as well as leisure facilities such as a restaurant and sports facilities. Young people are required to sign an agreement that they will be actively taking part in the training schemes. There are very few purpose built foyers which have been in operation and it is too early to assess their impact on youth homelessness, (YHG, 1995a). Critics have highlighted young people's concern about the foyer's size, potential compulsiveness and lack of self contained space, (YHG 1992, Youthaide, 1994). Furthermore, the capital and revenue implications of each scheme have not been addressed. The low level of support offered might also make them less suitable for care leavers.

Housing policy - recommendations

There is a need to amend the Housing Act 1996 to make care leavers a separate category under the priority need groups. This would entitle care leavers to the provision of permanent and secure social housing once the allocation of social housing policy has been amended as outlined by the Housing Minister in June 1997.

The Department of the Environment and the Department of Health should issue joint guidance to local authority social services and housing departments requiring them to establish an allocations policy for the provision of social housing for care leavers moving into independent housing. This could be done by strengthening Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 and making it a duty for housing departments to provide housing for care leavers.

Housing departments should be instructed by the Department of the Environment to develop joint protocols to assess the needs of homeless young people including care leavers under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and Housing Act 1996. This would prevent young people being sent from one agency to another and enable the allocation of social housing after having become homeless. This should also be considered for care leavers who have lost a previous tenancy but whose assessment has shown that they have the necessary skills to maintain a tenancy either unsupported or with the support of a nominated agency. The identification of support should be the responsibility of the social services department in partnership with the young person.

There is a need for a range of supported accommodation options available locally ranging from shared housing schemes and hostels to floating support schemes, (Action on Aftercare, 1996). Foyers should only be developed as accommodation options if they meet local housing need. Floating support is potentially attractive for housing some care leavers who find it difficult to share with others but who have some independent living skills and require support to manage the transition to independent living successfully.

In order to develop a range of provision for young people, there is a need to plan new services on an inter agency basis and on an assessment of local need.

This approach has been promoted by Centrepont, Char and Shelter, (Centrepont Oxfordshire 1992, McCluskey, 1997). For example, the Young Homeless Project in Leamington Spa developed on this basis providing a range of services within one project. There is an advice service, emergency accommodation, long term shared houses with key working support, a floating support scheme of self contained single units, supported lodgings in volunteer homes and a rent deposit schemes which aims to help young people find accommodation in the private sector.

In order to provide a range of services to meet the needs of care leavers and homeless young people, extensive capital and revenue funding will be required. A joint strategy by the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health should make housing for vulnerable young people a priority for funding. Capital schemes could be funded by top slicing the Approved Development Programme. Revenue should be secured by top slicing the allocation of the Special Needs Management Allowance, Section 180 of the Housing Act 1996 and lottery funds.

Social security policies

Wallace and Jones (1992) and Jones (1995) argued that social security policies have been introduced to make young people dependent on their families rather than the state. Land (1996) and Action on After Care (1996) pointed out that social security policies continue to undermine care leavers' transition to adulthood.

The young women in the longitudinal study, who lost employment, were also adversely affected by having their benefit reduced and all of those living on benefit struggled in living on such a low income. The questionnaire also showed that living on a low income adversely affected the transition to adulthood of young women leaving care.

Young people who are unemployed can claim the Job Seekers Allowance which was introduced in October 1996 replacing Unemployment Benefit and Income Support for those over 18, single and unemployed.

The aim of the Job Seekers Allowance is to enable more benefit claimants to find work by agreeing to a detailed action plan outlining what steps are to be taken to find employment. This plan is reviewed regularly. Employment service staff have the power to issue directions if they feel a claimant is failing to seek employment effecting, for example, personal appearance. Failure to keep to the action plan or directions can lead to benefit suspension.

This study showed that there was a high level of benefit dependency. The young women experienced benefit suspension if they lost employment. This made it difficult for them to pay their rent and fuel bills leading to debts potentially endangering their accommodation. Voluntary agencies working with care leavers feared that the strict requirements of the Job Seeker Allowance would lead to further financial hardship because benefit can be withdrawn completely rather than the previous 40% reduction, (Action on Aftercare, 1996).

Young people aged 16 and 17 who are unemployed can claim Income Support under the Severe Hardship criteria provided that they register for youth training. The Severe Hardship criteria are meant to provide a safety net of benefit for young people, for example, those estranged from their parents. It is usually paid for 4 weeks and is then reviewed monthly. Young people are expected to take on a training placement if it is offered. Action on Aftercare (1996) argued that claiming Severe Hardship is complex and the strict criteria mean that care leavers aged 16 and 17 can be turned down for benefit if they fail to take up a training placement or miss job interviews.

Under the Job Seekers Allowance young people can study part time for up to 16 hours a week. This discourages care leavers returning to further education full time because a full time course leads to the loss of benefit entitlement.

Social security policy - recommendations

Care leavers should be given an automatic entitlement to Income Support without having to pass the strict criteria of the Severe Hardship criteria until they have settled in stable accommodation.

It is likely that this is longer than the current review period of 4 weeks and should be given for an initial period of 12 months after moving into independence. If necessary it should be extended to the age of 18 for those who move into independence early. This would enable young people to find and maintain independent accommodation and make plans for the future without added pressure.

Care leavers income needs to be increased if they are to manage the transition to adulthood effectively without family support. This could be done by increasing the rate of the Job Seekers Allowance to the rate of those over the age of 25 or through social services subsidy via Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 which does not affect benefit.

Job Seekers Agreements need to take account of the special needs of care leavers. Agreements need to be negotiated with young people rather than imposed. They need to be flexible enough to motivate young people and offer achievable goals in order not to undermine the young people's self esteem and prevent breaches. Employment officers should consider the involvement of the careers service and a young person's support worker if appropriate.

Special guidance should be issued by the Department of Social Security to carefully consider the implications of suspending benefit for care leavers. Such a decision should also be reached in consultation with a young person's support worker if appropriate.

The 16 hour rule of the Job Seekers Allowance should be scrapped and young people should be able to receive financial support for full time further education courses.

Employment and training and further education

The government's training policies do not enable care leavers to complete their training successfully and find full time employment. The government offers every young person leaving school a place on Youth Training through the training guarantee. Good quality training aims to enable young people to gain qualifications and full time employment. The majority of care leavers fail to complete training courses and the only youth training

available to care leavers are often those schemes which require few qualifications and have low job prospects. Action on Aftercare (1996) argued that this means that government training policies have failed to take account of the support needs of care leavers whose lifestyle is too unstable to enable them to complete training courses.

In addition, many care leavers have poor educational qualifications and are likely to have absconded from school. It is possible that literacy skills need to be addressed before work placements can be found. In some areas 'Initial Training' was meant to perform this function. However, those schemes have closed in some areas.

The Modern Apprenticeship Scheme has been marketed as an advanced training programme with employed status for trainees and qualifications recognised by industry. It is possible that care leavers are least likely to have access to those schemes as competition for places increases.

There was little evidence that the young women in the longitudinal study received any ongoing careers advice in either helping them make employment choices or maintain training placements.

The Labour government announced the plans for its 'Welfare to Work' programme in July 1997, (Department of Education and Employment, 3.7.1997). Young people over the age of 18 and who have been unemployed for 6 months will be given 4 choices:

- voluntary work
- participation in an environmental task force
- working full time with a subsidy given to employers
- full time education for up to 12 months

Initially, there seemed to be some new possibilities for care leavers within those proposals. As care leavers often have fewer educational qualifications, the opportunity to undertake voluntary work or participate in an environmental task force to gain skills and experience would enable them to compete more effectively in the labour market.

Furthermore, it would also raise young people's self esteem. Currently voluntary work could conflict with the strict requirements of the Job Seekers Allowance. This scheme would overcome those difficulties as it would be recognised as a valid training opportunity.

However, welfare to work has been criticised for its compulsion of removing benefit from any young person not complying with the schemes strict criteria. The TUC warned that this could lead to an increase in youth homelessness as destitute young people with no income cannot afford housing, (Guardian, 4.7.1997). There will be a 4 month 'gateway' to prepare young people for any of the 4 options but pressure groups fear that for care leavers and homeless young people this period might be too short to provide them with settled housing before undertaking training, (YHG, 1997a).

It is estimated that only 1% of care leavers enter higher education, (Cheung and Heath, 1994) and few young people leaving care complete further education courses, (Biehal et al 1995). This shows that care leavers educational achievements continue to be lower post 16 than those of the population as a whole. There is a danger that care leavers who want to return to further education will continue to be prevented from doing so. The current restrictions under the Job Seekers Allowance mean that young people cannot study for more than 16 hours. Under the welfare to work proposals young people will be able to study for 12 months but many courses are 2 years rather than 12 months and this will restrict the qualifications young people can obtain.

This has led some care leavers to look towards social services departments to fund further education courses. Despite the emphasis on education in Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 and the associated guidance, the fact that it is a power rather than a duty to provide financial assistance means that social services departments feel unable to provide the necessary resources.

The 'Welfare to Work' plans and the budget have made concessions for single parents wishing to return to work by increasing the importance of the provision of adequate child care.

A significant number of the young women in the longitudinal study had become parents by the time they were 19. Some wanted to either work or return to education or training. The absence of cheap child care had prevented them from pursuing these options. The proposals announced so far are not addressing the young women's needs for affordable child care.

Employment, training and education policy - recommendations

There is a need for consistent careers advice for young people who are 'looked after' before they leave school and afterwards. At a local level the Careers Service should be involved in the development of leaving care policies ensuring that there is a close contact between both departments. Furthermore, preparation for leaving care policies should ensure the representation of the Careers Service.

There is a need to ensure that government training schemes funded through local TEC's address the needs of young people with special needs. Consideration should be given to the re-establishment of 'Initial Training' in all areas for young people who are vulnerable and have low educational achievements. There should be mechanisms to ensure that those least able to compete in the labour and training market also have access to training such as the Modern Apprenticeships.

There is a need for free child care for those young women wanting to pursue education and training.

The Department of Health - recommendations

In addition to the housing, social security and employment and training recommendations, the Department of Health needs to issue the following directions and introduce changes to the Children Act 1989 to ensure the success of the above recommendations. The Children Act 1989 should be amended in Section 24 to make it a duty for Social Services to arrange accommodation for care leavers moving into independence which is secure and affordable before a young person is discharged from 'care'.

In addition, there should be a duty to provide after care support until the age of 25 if it is requested. Once they leave care, young people should, at all times, be given the contact of a named worker rather than a senior officer with lead responsibility for leaving care. This person should contact a young person annually unless a young person requests that this contact should cease. A named contact should be given even after a case is closed so that care leavers have the opportunity of re-establishing a link if they so wish.

The power to provide financial assistance should be changed to a duty to provide help when young people are in crisis after they have left care. Furthermore, there should be a duty on social services departments to provide rent in advance and deposit bonds for those renting in the private sector as well as financial help to complete further education courses. Young people 'looked after', who are unemployment and living independently, need to have access to clear and coherent financial support procedures.

There should be a duty on social services departments to enable young mothers who are 'looked after' to continue in education and training through the provision of child care. In addition, social services departments need to establish clear procedures for young parents in their care. There is a requirement to have clear placement agreements outlining the responsibility of foster carers and the young mother in relation to the child as well as coherent financial support.

The emphasis on inter agency forums to develop leaving care policies and services should be changed to a duty to establish those serviced by social services departments. There is a need to make explicit reference in the notes of guidance to the importance of specific areas of work within the preparation for leaving care such as decision making skills, making and sustaining relationships and work on taking responsibility.

Social services department should through regulations be instructed to develop a joint protocol to assess the needs of homeless young people and within this care leavers with the housing department under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and the homelessness legislation.

Finally, departments need to ensure that they have clear leaving care planning and monitoring systems and that the information from both is used by management to plan and evaluate services for the future taking account of user feedback, (Social Services Inspectorate, 1997).

The Department of Health should establish an initiative to fund a small number of pilot schemes offering independent counselling and mediation services for young people who are vulnerable with priority given to care leavers. These schemes should also offer mediation where foster placements are at risk of breaking down because of conflict. The schemes should be evaluated. If successful in resolving conflict in inter-personal relationships, consideration should be given to how those services can be extended nationally.

Implications of the typology

The guidance to the Children Act 1989 emphasised the importance of planned social work with children and young people who are 'looked after'. In 'Looking After Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes' the Department of Health (1995) outlined a planning tool to assist local authority social services departments with the implementation of a comprehensive planning system for children 'looked after'. The aim of the planning system is to ensure stability and good quality care for children 'looked after' by involving social workers, the child's parents and children themselves in planning the child's future. Social workers are required to produce and review regular care and assessment plans which must take account of issues such as the child's health, education, cultural and social identity, family and social relationships, inter personal skills, emotional and behavioural development and self care skills. Each plan must specify tasks and who will undertake those. The review then examines whether those tasks have been completed, whether there have been changes to the plan and what the explanation for those changes is.

It is possible that this new planning and monitoring system will ensure that the difficulties which were highlighted by the typology may be addressed.

However, the typology went a step further by suggesting that there may be groups with different needs among young women 'looked after' because of their different family and care experiences. Therefore, different issues apply, for example, self harm in the case of abused women and challenging behaviour by young women who experienced family conflict. As the young women enter adolescence the typology highlights the existence of different skills in making decisions and negotiating relationships with carers. Furthermore, it was suggested that once the young women left care, groups A and C managed the transition to adulthood more successfully than groups B and D.

These differences are not as easily recognised by the planning system as a wide range of issues need to be addressed with each young woman. In practice it is unlikely that workers will be able to address all the issues in the time they have available. The questionnaire results supported this assessment. The contribution of the typology to social work practice is to add more detail to the planning process in highlighting areas which could be particularly problematic for certain groups of young women, and highlighting skills which were found to be important in managing the transition to adulthood and the level of support required to maintain housing, employment and income.

Given the evidence of the questionnaire it would seem premature to redefine the typology, though it needs to be tested further on larger samples.

The typology and social work practice - recommendations

The typology, in recognising differences among young women leaving care, has implications for the development of social work practice in this field.

Group A: Victims of abuse - successful transition to adulthood - Survivor

The analysis of the characteristics of this group has specific implications for foster care. In particular the young women's feelings need to be taken account of in the nature of placements selected and the training of foster carers. The process of building and maintaining relationships may have to be learned. The women may test relationships with carers and this requires consistency and commitment from carers.

If possible a long term placement should be sought which provides stability during adolescence up to the age of 18 or later. Whilst looked after, and later if requested, counselling to look at impact of abuse and foster care, should be offered. This should be confidential and independent of social services. Close relationships with social workers become important. Social workers need to address the issue of relationships with peers. Planning for leaving care needs to take account of the fact that young women need to feel safe and secure. There is less need to address practical issues but a strong relationship with a worker could provide emotional support. Ongoing support should be offered. A fieldwork approach to leaving care with a consistent worker could address those issues.

Permanent accommodation should be arranged upon leaving care, based on floating support.

Group B: Victims of abuse- problematic transition to adulthood - Victim

This is possibly a group of young women who require the most skilled intervention and ongoing support for a long period of time. Particularly building and maintaining relationships may have to be learned. The women in Sub group 1 may require foster carers to be trained on the impact of abuse and how to negotiate and mediate in conflict. Communication skills may also be important. Given the high number of likely foster home disruptions, social workers should consider earlier rather than later, the possibility of a therapeutic community in addressing the needs of these young women (Little, 1995).

In the absence of supportive families and partners, social services needs to take this role and offer this kind of support well into their twenties. Preparation for leaving care and leaving care itself needs to be planned with secure accommodation and support. The young women should be encouraged to remain in a social services placement until they have reached 17 or 18 years. Difficulties in coping have to be expected and an effective safety net needs to be provided.

Due to the experience of abuse and neglect of the young women in Sub group 2 it is also probable and appropriate that young women are looked after permanently.

They require foster carers who understand the impact of abuse and are skilled in handling conflict and pressure in relationships. Preparation for leaving care needs to take account of the young women's increasing wishes for freedom and independence increase.

If work continues with this group it should be possible to organise planned moves into independence with negotiated support, particularly when accommodation or employment breaks down. If there are no close supportive relationships from parent/s then social services needs to fulfil this role.

Social workers need to consider how to address the issue of parenting skills with all members of group B. If relationships with workers are poor, this and other support work might be more appropriately undertaken by a specialist worker. It is possible that many of the young women in this group would benefit from a therapeutic approach to leaving care which can meet their emotional needs.

Group C: Young women with challenging behaviour - successful transition to adulthood- Settler

The women in this group are likely to display challenging behaviour in foster and residential care. Boundaries have to be flexible as they are likely to be broken. Young women need to be given the feeling that they are liked and respected but that carers will use sanctions to enforce boundaries.

Being looked after could provide the opportunity for a breathing space for the family. This could enable sessions of family mediation to negotiate conflicts to take place. If young women are looked after, then they and their parents need to be prepared emotionally for mediation. Furthermore, mediation should be provided independent of social services so that it cannot be seen to be taking sides. If a return home is not possible and mediation is not acceptable then ways need to be established in how family contact can be maintained.

It is to be expected that this group might move into independence early. Young women should be prepared for leaving care and with negotiated support from parent/s and social services or a specialist project. Relationships with social workers could be poor. Accommodation needs to involve extensive support and boundaries need to be negotiated.

It is important not to place too much responsibility on the young women too early. Individual work should continue with young women who have little ability to take responsibility, probably from outside the statutory sector. As some of the group might not wish for intensive contact, drop ins and a social action approach should be considered. This might also strengthen negotiation skills.

Once the young women are able to take responsibility, it is important to ensure a good support system to provide stable and secure opportunities for them, either through families or specialist services.

Group D: Young women with challenging behaviour - problematic transition to adulthood - Challenger

Due to the strong similarities with group C, the same considerations for family mediation, support and foster care apply as outlined above. If young women remain looked after it is important to plan for leaving care early and maintain a safety net. The issues of decision making skills and taking responsibility need to be addressed while the women are looked after. Like group C it is important not to place too much responsibility on the young women too early.

Accommodation needs to be provided with flexible support. The potential risks of debts, homelessness and children being at risk need to be addressed. Work is best done by workers not part of social services. They can challenge young people but maintain a relationship and should be prepared to pick up the pieces until young women can resolve the conflict between wanting freedom and needing to take responsibility.

It is probably important to have specialist workers or projects who can provide ongoing support. A mixture of a social action and therapeutic approach is required to meet changing needs. Workers need to be skilled in being able to identify the point at which they young women are able to maintain a tenancy and this might require more than one attempt.

Social work practice - further recommendations

The importance of the issue of relationships for women has been highlighted, (Gilligan, 1982). There is a need for social work practice to look closely at the way young women build and maintain relationships whilst they are looked after. In particular the focus should be on future support systems such as family members, foster carers, social workers, friends and partners if appropriate, (Social Services Inspectorate, 1997). The young women should be given the opportunity to explore the breakdown of relationships.

In view of the complex experience of the young women in this study, it will be important for an increasing emphasis on joint work between social workers and psychologists to assess the needs of children when they are admitted to care and establish a therapeutic plan.

The number of unplanned pregnancies in this and other studies, (Garnett, 1992; Biehal, 1995) demonstrates the need for work with young women on this issue. There is a need to work with young people whilst they are looked after on positive health care rather than enforcing an annual health check. Furthermore, young people should be made aware of the services on offer after they have left care.

Recommendations for further research

More research is required to investigate the typology further and establish causal factors contributing to a successful transition to adulthood. For example, good decision making skills, being aware of the consequences of their actions and accepting responsibilities for themselves and their actions as well as inter personal relationships, played a major part.

However, I was unable to conclude whether those skills were gained at home, school or whilst 'looked after'. I was also unable to reach a firm conclusion about the effect of a period of stability whilst 'looked after'.

A further study should involve a larger sample and would benefit from an interdisciplinary approach of social work and psychology to develop assessment mechanisms.

Little empirical work has examined why some children manage the impact of family disruption and/or abuse better than others. Those studies which examined the impact of childhood abuse focused on those children who showed distress such as challenging behaviour, anger and mistrust as well as psychiatric illness, (Finkelhor and Browne, 1986). Less attention has been paid to those children who managed the impact of their parent's separation and abuse well. Sociological research has recently begun on children experiencing family separation, (Clarke, 1996). Until more information is available from both psychological and sociological perspectives, a comparison between those children who cope with separation and abuse, and those who don't, will not be possible.