Received: 24/04/2026
Accepted: 05/11/2026

Keywords: Care leaver, Education outcomes, Economic outcomes, middle adulthood, life course

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17868/strath.00097742

Original Research Article

Beyond emerging adulthood: Educational and economic outcomes of care-experienced adults navigating middle and late adulthood

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Abstract

Research on care-experienced populations outcomes have concentrated heavily on the transition from adolescence to early adulthood, leaving little understanding of how the life trajectories of care-experienced individuals unfold beyond their twenties. This scoping review advances a life-course framing by examining how educational and economic trajectories unfold beyond emerging adulthood. A structured search of PsycINFO, Scopus, and OVID Social Science Abstracts identified 4,846 records, of which 32 studies published between 2000 and 2023 met the inclusion criteria. Across countries and cohorts, adults with care histories consistently demonstrated lower educational attainment, weaker labour force participation, and greater reliance on social assistance than peers without care experience. However, several studies document delayed rather than absent trajectories of educational and labour market integration, with some individuals returning to school or stabilising employment later in adulthood. Evidence further indicates disproportionate vulnerability among men, Indigenous and racialised alumni, individuals with disabilities, and those with placement instability or histories of group care. Overall, these findings suggest that the consequences of out-of-home care extend well beyond emerging

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adulthood and highlight the need for a stronger research agenda and policy responses that adopt a life-course perspective.

Introduction

Research on care-experienced populations has focused heavily on outcome data up to the transition to adulthood (Dworsky, 2009; Okypch et al., 2025, Scannapieco et al., 2007; Zeira, et al., 2023). Yet educational attainment, labour market integration, and financial stability do not unfold on a timetable that ends in the mid-twenties. Furthermore, young people leaving care have well-documented barriers to higher education and employment (Pecora et al., 2006). There is some evidence suggesting care-leavers' delayed educational attainment and labour market entry may alter life-course income trajectories, which could have compounding effects over time (Okpych & Courtney, 2014). Emerging evidence further suggests that some care leavers experience delayed rather than disrupted integration into the workforce (Achdut, 2022a) and later paths towards higher education (Gilligan & Brady, 2022). As a result, the current literature has not fully captured the heterogeneity of adult trajectories among care-experienced populations.

Research on foster care transitions consistently identifies educational and economic disadvantages across countries. Studies document lower high school (Refaeli et al., 2013; Reilly, 2003; Rosenberg & Kim, 2018; Schelbe et al., 2022) and postsecondary (Pecora et al., 2006; Okpych et al., 2025), completion rates, higher unemployment, poorer working conditions (Cameron et al., 2018; Ibrahim & Howe, 2011; Lee & Yoon, 2009; Zeira et al., 2014), and diminished financial well-being (Keller, 2022). Indeed, research has also shown up to 50% of care-leavers neither in work nor in school by age 21 (Harrison et al., 2023). These early disadvantages are closely linked to housing instability and financial precarity, which, in turn, constrain educational and employment opportunities (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Rosenberg & Kim 2018). Researchers have further found that higher rates of placements of instability (Pecora et al., 2006a) are associated with a lower propensity for young people to have completed their secondary degree and are less likely to find employment during the early 20s (Goyette et al., 2021). Whether these trends persist across countries and cohorts is less clear.

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These transition-age milestones in education and employment likely have meaningful impacts on later life trajectories. Most care-leaving research stops following participants by age 30, leaving little understanding of whether early disadvantages persist, worsen, or change across later adulthood. As a result, the field knows much more about the immediate transition from care than about the longer-term educational and economic trajectories of care-experienced adults. This creates a major blind spot in the literature, because delayed education, unstable labour market entry, and cumulative economic disadvantage may not be fully visible by the mid-twenties.

These psychosocial and economic challenges facing transition-age foster youth have been examined in systematic and scoping reviews (Gypen et al., 2017; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018; Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). For example, Okpych et al.'s (2025) recent systematic review found that over the last two decades, high school completion rates ranged from 69-85% but only 8-12% of former foster youth completed college. Taylor et al.'s (2024) systematic review examined the effectiveness of programs and policies to address unemployment among foster youth. Several scoping reviews are dedicated to understanding interventions that foster improved educational and employment outcomes, such as independent living programs and services (Doucet et al., 2022) and college-based support programs. Meta-analytic reviews have found that black care-experienced young adults are 20% less likely to find living wage employment while also being 18% less likely to have mental health issues than their care-experienced peers (Kennedy et al, 2022). Similarly, Kennedy et al. (2022), found that Hispanic youth are less likely to find stable housing after leaving care compared to their non-Hispanic counterparts.

These systematic and scoping reviews delineate clear hardships facing youth in the transition from care and offer critical insights for the development of contextually sensitive programming for youth and young adults. However, these reviews offer limited insights about trajectories beyond the transition to adulthood (Refaeli, 2017; Keller, 2020; 2025). This temporal limitation obscures whether observed disadvantages reflect permanent deficits or delayed and non-linear trajectories. A life-course perspective is therefore essential to capture how educational and economic pathways evolve over time.

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In this review, the term 'care-experienced adult' refers broadly to individuals with histories of out-of-home care, including foster, kinship, residential, and group care. The term 'aged-out' is used only when studies explicitly examine those discharged at the age of majority. Given variability in definitions across studies, findings should be interpreted as reflecting outcomes among care-experienced adults broadly rather than exclusively those who aged out.

Method

Search strategy

This review draws on a literature search originally conducted as a part of a PhD dissertation focused on examining later life outcomes among care experienced adults (Keller, 2025). Because of the breadth of findings on later life outcomes the review was divided into three papers addressing: 1.) health and mental health, 2.) education and economic outcomes, and 3.) relationships respectively. The focus of this second scoping review is on educational and economic outcomes. The review was conducted in accordance with Arksey & O'Malley's (2005) framework and follows the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. The search strategy was developed in collaboration with a McGill University Social Work Librarian. The database searches were all run on June 12, 2023.

Initially, PsycINFO, Scopus and OVID Social Science Abstracts queried using the following Boolean search terms were employed in search one: 'Foster Care' OR 'Care Leavers' OR 'foster care alumni' AND 'Outcome*' OR 'Longitudinal' OR 'Long-Term Prospective'. In search two, we used the following terms: 'Foster Care' OR 'Care Leavers' OR 'Foster care alumni' AND 'Qualitative' OR 'Narrative' OR 'ethnography.' The two searches were designed to identify complimentary evidence. The first search was used to identify primarily quantitative outcome evidence. While the second search was used to identify more qualitative studies exploring care experienced adults' experiences and perspectives. Results from both independent searches were combined in Rayyan and duplicate records were removed before screening. The combined records were then screened against the same inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify articles eligible for the review.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed by the first author, and screening was conducted by two reviewers using Rayyan. Studies

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were included if they examined adults with childhood histories of foster, kinship, group, or other forms of out-of-home care and reported outcomes for participants aged 30 or older at the time of interview or measurement. This age threshold was selected to address a key age-gap in the literature, as care-leaver researchers typically stop collecting data between by age 30. Accordingly, eligible studies were required to report findings after age 30. In mixed-age samples, studies were included if they contained a meaningful subgroup of participants aged 30 or older, defined as at least five participants in qualitative research or 10% of the sample in quantitative studies, reflecting the limited availability of research in this age range. Wherever possible we pulled information and quotes focused on older care leavers lives in the mixed age studies. For this review we looked for articles that reported on educational, employment, financial, or other socioeconomic outcomes. Studies also had to be published in English between January 1, 2000, and June 12, 2023, and use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research designs.

Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused exclusively on children or on adults younger than 30; (2) did not clearly indicate participants' ages at the time of interview, follow-up, or outcome assessment; (3) included participants over age 30 but reported only retrospective accounts of childhood or early transition experiences without providing findings related to adult life after emerging adulthood; (4) focused primarily on foster parents, caregivers, or professionals rather than care-experienced adults; (5) focused primarily on adopted populations; or (6) fell outside the specified publication date and language criteria.

Any disagreements between reviewers were discussed between authors 1 and 2, until a consensus was reached. The following data were extracted from each included study: author and year of publication, country of study, dataset or cohort name, participant age range, placement type, whether participants aged out of care, and reported outcomes related to employment, education, and income. Data extraction for this paper focused specifically on indicators of educational attainment, labour market participation, and financial outcomes in adulthood, and these study characteristics and outcomes are summarised below in the Appendix. The search initially identified 4,846 records, and after screening titles, abstracts, and full texts against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 32 articles met the eligibility criteria and were included in this review. See Figure 1.

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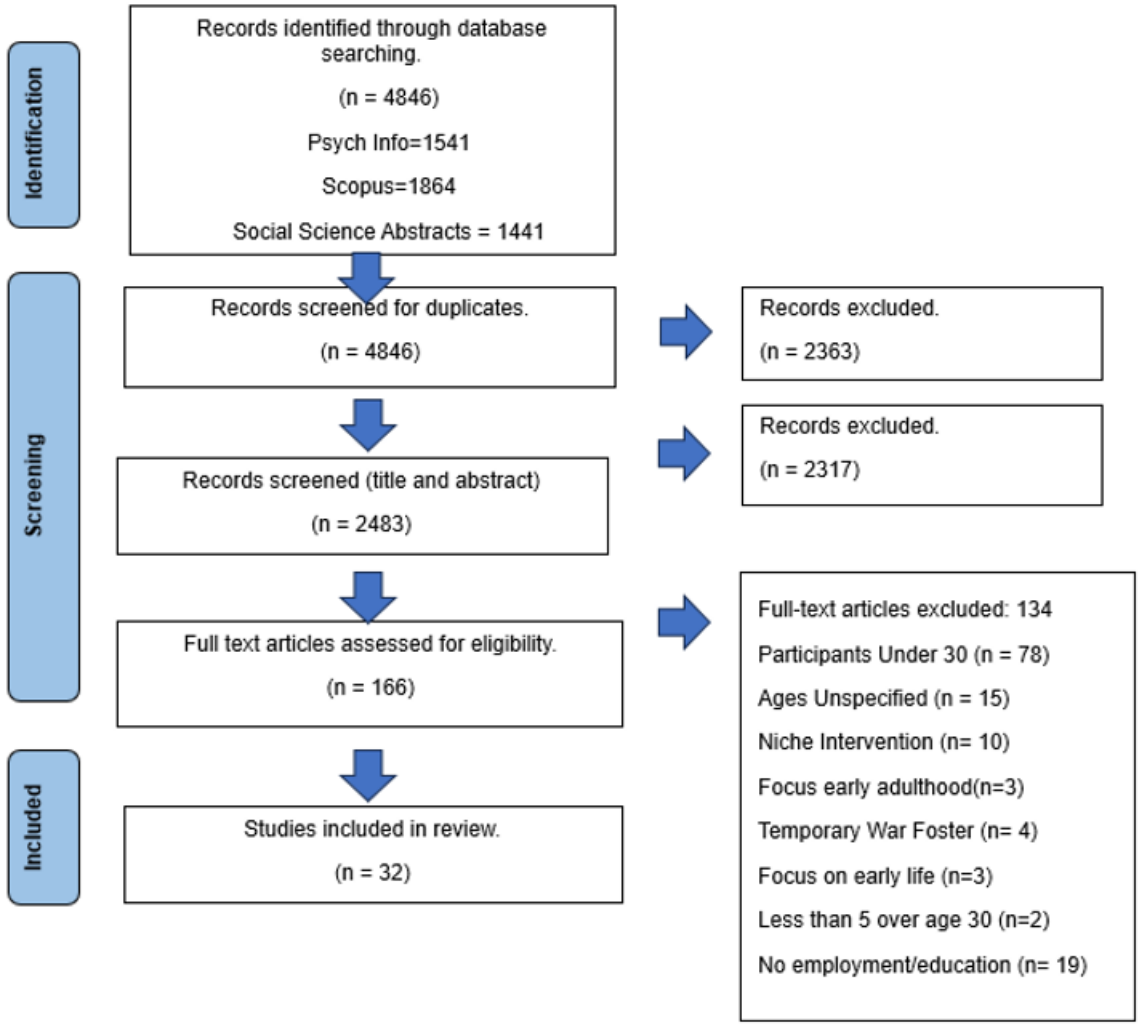

Figure 1 – Prisma Flow Diagram

Results

Thirty-two studies met inclusion criteria, with most conducted in North America and Europe, and some across Israel, and Australia, reflecting the limited availability of life-course research published in English. Of these studies, 28 reported on at least one educational outcome, 25 reported on employment-related outcomes, and 22 shared insights about financial outcomes. In terms of study design, 24 (75%) employed quantitative methods, six used qualitative approaches, and two used mixed-methods designs. Just under half of the included studies (15 of 32) explicitly used a theoretical framework. Life course theory was the most common (n = 6), followed by ecological risk or ecological-transactional models (n = 3) and cumulative disadvantage or cumulative risk perspectives (n = 2). The remaining 17 studies did not specify a guiding theoretical framework. The United States was over-represented in the dataset, contributing 14 of the

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32 included studies. Five studies were from Sweden, three from Israel, three from Ireland. Two studies compared outcomes across Norway, Denmark, and the UK, and one compared the UK, Germany, and Finland. Portugal, Australia, Canada, and Greece each contributed one study. Within these studies 11 recruited alumni from all forms of placement, 9 had unclear child welfare placement histories, 6 were specifically recruited with group care histories, and 6 specifically focused on foster care alumni. To see a numerical break down for the included studies, country, data sets used, and age ranges of participants please see the Appendix.

Overall education findings

Across most studies, alumni of care attained lower educational qualifications than the general population or matched peers (Brännström 2017; 2020; 2022; Cameron 2018; Fernandez, 2017; Okpych et al., 2021; Zlotnick, 2012). This was true for both high school (Schneider et al., 2009; Cameron 2018; Fernandez, 2017) and college completion (Schneider et al., 2009; Fernandez, 2017; Okypch, et al., 2021).

When examining the factors associated with lower educational outcomes, we found that various challenges impact care leavers' educational trajectories. For instance, in an Australian study, approximately 40% of the participants felt they were behind academically upon emancipation. The care leavers attributed this trend to a lack of encouragement from educational institutions (39.6%) and teachers (34.6%). Some care leavers noted difficulties paying attention in school (36.4%), while others had to work (27.8%) to make ends meet (Fernandez, 2017). According to the European-based against-all-odds study, financial concerns hindered their educational paths (Boddy, 2020). Several participants in a Greek sample reported that the institution failed to acknowledge their special education needs and/or adequately support their education (Tatsiopoulou, 2020). These educational barriers reported by many participants did not interfere with everyone's educational journey. Furthermore, as will be outlined below, those who could advance their education, typically had improved sense of well-being and economic outcomes.

Educational resilience factors

Diverse factors were associated with improved academic success. In the United States, foster care experienced adults who rated their relationship with their last foster family as good were 2.2 times more likely to complete high school (Pecora 2006b). A U.S.-based study reported that

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foster care alumni degree completion rates were associated with life circumstances after youth entered care. For instance, financial hardships, the need to work, and parental responsibilities were associated with reduced degree completion rates. Several college-level factors, such as higher institutional spending on academic and student supports, and increased rates of Pell Grant recipients, were associated with increased degree completion rates. In contrast, universities that had a higher percentage of part-time students were associated with a lower chance of care alumni completing their degree (Okpych & Courtney 2021). MacKenzie (2003) documented that older care leavers from U.S. based, midwestern farm-based orphanages had on average higher graduation rates and higher retirement incomes than the general white population. However, these alumni experienced more childhood stability that group modern day group care settings, because they were housed in their mid-20th century orphanage for an average of eight years, and 90% were placed with their siblings from their families of origin. They also learned the skills to work on the farm over this developmental period. This Mackenzie (2003) study suggests that learning from older models of group care, and surveying older adults with more positive experiences in group care settings could help to inform modern day services.

Delayed educational advancement.

A handful of studies suggest that alumni of care are somewhat delayed in completing their education. Brady and Gilligan, for example, reported that in Ireland many participants were still advancing their education in their late twenties and early thirties (Brady & Gilligan, 2020a). These results are reiterated in two English studies suggesting that some children in care who academically underperform during childhood catch up over time in adulthood (Brännström 2020; Cameron 2018). An Australian study reinforced the theme of care leavers catching up over time, although the number of Australian participants who reported pursued higher education later in life was a relatively small percentage of participants in the overall study (Fernandez et al., 2017).

Educational attainment and well-being

Higher educational attainment was broadly associated with improved life circumstances (Brännström, 2022). In an Israeli sample, youth with higher high school rankings and those accepted into university had greater life satisfaction (Achdut et al., 2022b), lower psychological

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distress (Sulimani et al., 2022), and increased labour force attachment (Achdut et al., 2022a). Boddy et al. (2020) found that financial anxiety can influence educational attainment. Therefore, educational successes are associated with improved well-being in care experienced adults. We cannot establish directionality because well-being, conversely, could influence educational successes. However, not every care alumnus is positioned at the age of majority to complete high school or pursue higher education, and in fact many experience structural barriers.

Structural barriers and individual factors

Intersectionality is currently not well captured in most studies, which tend to report on structural or individual barriers in isolation. Capturing these themes is critical to understanding which profiles need more support in completing high school and postsecondary education. For example, a transnational study found that male care leavers were significantly less likely to pursue higher education (Cameron et al., 2018). Likewise, alumni with disabilities in the U.S. had lower educational attainment (Anctil et al, 2007b). A Swedish study found an achievement gap in the care-experienced group, which was largely explained by differences in childhood IQ (Brännström et al., 2020). Disruptive behaviour and poverty rates from families of origin were significantly associated with lower education completion (Brännström et al., 2020). In Finland, those who entered care later were found to be at an educational disadvantage at age 28 (Cameron 2018). These individual and placement-based factors could provide a basis for future reporting.

Racial and ethnic disparities

The Casey Family cohort study examines the life course outcomes of adults who were placed for at least one year in their private foster family care, in the USA. The included articles in this study report on outcomes from between the ages of 20-49. Their unique dataset allows for in-depth examination racial and ethnic educational and employment disparities for care experienced adults. For example, Indigenous alumni are less likely to receive a high school diploma or pursue advanced education than their Caucasian counterparts in the U.S. (O'Brien et al, 2010). White alumni in their sample were almost twice as likely to earn a college degree (11.4%) as African American (6.7%) and Hispanic alumni (6.3%), but neither the White-Hispanic nor the White-Black differences were statistically significant, likely owing to sample size limitations (Villegas, 2014). There

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are fewer articles from other countries speaking to racial disparities however in Israel Archdut (2022a) found that Israeli immigrant youth with care experience were more committed to the work force than their non-immigrant care experienced peers. It is unclear if this is more positive and reflective of a healthy attachment to work, or if it may be out of economic necessity, as their study could not report on income.

Generational strengths and challenges

A few studies examining larger numbers of participants across generations found that specific age cohorts were distinctly vulnerable to poorer educational outcomes, presumably due to structural factors such as policy and/or cultural shifts within countries (Artamonova et al., 2020; Mackenzie, 2003; Tatsiopoulou, 2020). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review these complex historical shifts in care paradigms across countries, decades, and cohorts, surveying care leavers for longer could help identify community-level resilience factors and best practices for transition-age youth. To see the age ranges of these studies, please see the Appendix.

Employment and economic outcomes

Overall employment findings

While educational trajectories shape early pathways, employment outcomes reveal how these patterns consolidate over time. There were 19 studies that reported on employment findings. Many studies reported that care-experienced adults are less likely to be employed than their peers (Stewart et al., 2014; Viner & Taylor, 2005). A multinational European study found that those aged 30+ who were ever in care were much less likely to be employed than their same-age peers without care experiences. There were, however, important differences in unemployment rates between countries in the multinational comparison studies. For example, although unemployment rates of care leavers were double across three European countries, this disparity is less significant in Germany and most prominent in Finland (Cameron et al., 2018). Higher care-leaver unemployment rates were also found in a Canadian Metis sample (Kaspar, 2014) and an Israeli sample (Achdut et al., 2022).

The lack of longitudinal designs with multiple data collection points, limits our ability to conclude how engagement with the employment market varies over time for care leavers. One study, however, reported that in

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Israel, 20–25% of care leavers in their twenties are uninvolved with the workforce but this decreases by the early thirties (Archdut, 2022a). Another study focused on the employment quality experienced by care-leavers, finding them less likely to occupy managerial and professional roles in adulthood (Sacker 2022). Successful employment integration reduces the need for reliance on financial assistance, which is another area of inquiry.

Economic outcomes

Financial outcomes reviewed in 22 of the included studies; however, the focus varied considerably between studies as some reported on welfare and unemployment registration, annual earnings, economic precarity, housing quality, and/or home ownership. This emerging area of work offers a glimpse into how early precarity unfolds. In the few studies that compare adults with care experience to matched peers they consistently find that care experienced adults have lower incomes on average than their matched peers (Anctil et al., 2007b; Brännström et al., 2022; Kaspar et al., 2014).

Two studies reported that care-experienced adults were more likely to receive welfare and unemployment benefits than matched controls and the general population (Brännström et al., 2020; Schneider, 2009; Zlotnick, 2012). This statistical distribution was true in midlife for two European samples (Brännström, 2022; Cameron et al., 2018), a Canadian Metis sample (Kaspar, 2014), an Australian sample (Fernandez, et al., 2017), and a California-based population panel study (Schneider, 2009). These findings suggest that economic inequality continues beyond emerging adulthood for a significant number of care-experienced adults. Early financial hardships could influence later life financial trajectories and one Israeli sample found that alumni who lacked access to essential goods during their transition from group care placement experienced lower financial well-being and career/housing satisfaction for years after placement (Achdut, et al., 2022b).

Housing is another area of reporting in the care-experienced outcome literature, measured differently across cultures, studies, and countries. For example, an Australian study reported that care-experienced adults have higher rates of housing insecurity, lower rates of home ownership, and higher rental costs than the general population (Fernandez et al., 2017), while a Canadian Metis study suggested that those with a history

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of foster care placement were more likely to reside in dwellings requiring major repairs (Kaspar, 2014). This finding was echoed in a qualitative Greek study, which reported that most of their sample faced important housing issues during their lifetime, including occasional inability to meet rental and housing costs, poor and unhealthy housing conditions, and frequent housing changes (Tatsiopoulou, 2020). Although moderate attention has been paid to housing insecurity and sub-par housing, none of the included studies reported on the question of homelessness for care leavers in the middle of adulthood.

Intersectional considerations

In this emerging area of work, intersectionality is not well analysed in terms of economic outcomes among care-experienced adults, as most research reports on individual, placement-related, or structural risk factors in isolation. Understanding how these dimensions co-occur is critical to identifying which subpopulations are most structurally vulnerable across the life course. For example, researchers found that alumni who experienced more chronic child abuse (Curry, 2017) and those who had more documented reasons for placement (Harris 2009) were each associated with increased economic vulnerability across the life course. Those who experienced more placement moves (Pecora et al., 2006b), those from group care settings (Sacker, 2022), those with childhood disabilities (Harris 2009), and those who were first placed in foster care during their adolescence were more economically vulnerable than care experienced peer who did not have these experiences (Osterberg, 2018). Men with care experience were also found to be more economically vulnerable well into their 40s than their female counterparts (Sacker, 2022).

Family of origin and broader structural factors further contribute to disparities in economic outcomes. For instance, an Israeli study tracking intergenerational life conditions of care experienced adults, found those whose biological families received welfare and those with parents who had criminal convictions were more connected to the labour market, but they suspected this was out of urgency and likely associated with lower-quality jobs (Achdut et al., 2022a). In two studies examining ethnicity-based factors within the Casey family cohort, the researchers reported Black youths were less likely than white alumni to own a home (Harris 2009). O'Brien and colleagues (2010) further reported that Indigenous care leavers were less likely to be employed or have a household income

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above the poverty line, and more likely to receive public assistance. These patterns point to the role of structural inequalities, including systemic racism and socioeconomic marginalisation, in shaping post-care outcomes.

Discussion

This scoping review extends the care-experienced outcome literature by challenging its implicit temporal focus on emerging adulthood. Although prior scholarship has documented heightened vulnerabilities of transition-age youth (Courtney et al., 2007; McGhee et al., 2022), this synthesis shows that these disparities do not end in the early twenties. Across countries and cohorts, care-experienced adults demonstrate lower educational attainment, weaker labour force participation, and greater economic precarities than their same-age peers. At the same time, the review also suggests that later-life trajectories are not uniformly fixed in early adulthood. A small but important body of evidence indicates that some care-experienced adults continue to pursue education (Brady & Gilligan, 2020a) or stabilise their employment later than expected (Archdut 2022a), pointing to a delayed rather than absent workforce integration for at least part of the population.

The findings indicate that educational and economic trajectories are not fixed by the mid-twenties and instead unfold across the life course. Taken together, these findings support the need for a more explicit life-course understanding of post-care outcomes. Much of the existing literature remains concentrated on the immediate transition from care, which makes it difficult to determine whether early disadvantages persist unchanged, worsen over time, or are partially mitigated through later re-engagement with education or employment opportunities. This review suggests that the prevailing focus on emerging adulthood may obscure important heterogeneity in adult pathways. For some individuals, educational and economic marginalisation appears cumulative and enduring; for others, adulthood may involve slower and non-linear advancement. Social work research therefore needs to move beyond emerging adulthood to better capture how care-experienced adults navigate education, work, and financial security across a longer stretch of the life course.

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This review also highlights that later-life outcomes are not evenly distributed across care-experienced populations. Greater vulnerability was reported among men, Indigenous and racialised alumni (Harris et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2010; Villegas et al., 2014), adults with disabilities (Anctil, 2007b), those with placement instability (Pecora et al., 2006a), as well as those with history of group care (Sacker et al., 2022). However, these factors were most often examined in isolation rather than through intersectional or cumulative models such as Brännström (2017). As a result, the literature remains limited in its ability to explain how structural marginalisation, placement history, and developmental timing combine to shape long-term educational and economic outcomes. Cross-national differences in employment and welfare reliance further suggest that policy context may matter, but the current evidence base is not yet strong enough to identify which policy environments are most protective. A more analytically developed research agenda is therefore needed that better distinguishes individual, structural and system-level contributors to later-life inequity.

Limitations

This review has several limitations in its search strategy and the available data constraints and potential selection biases of the included studies. First, the Boolean search terms, date range, and focus on English language peer-reviewed publications, could have inadvertently excluded important studies if they were published outside the selected period, used alternative terminology, appeared in other languages or other publication formats. Secondly, the evidence base itself imposes important constraints on interpretation. Many of the studies examined adults who were ever in the system not necessarily those who aged out of the system, limiting the conclusion that can be drawn about foster care alumni who experienced abrupt transitions to adulthood. Likewise, very few of the included studies control for placement type (foster family vs. group care settings) or aged-out status in their analyses, further reducing the precision of how we can interpret these later-life findings. Third, the datasets included in this review are primarily based in North America, Europe, Israel, and Australia, which limits geographic breadth. Despite these limitations, it is believed that this review provides key areas for further development and exploration.

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Future research directions

Future directions in education

Taken together, this review suggests that future research should prioritise the development of longer-term follow-up studies, more precise and intersectional analyses, and outcome measures that better capture the diversity of care-experienced adults later-life trajectories. Educational access and success have the potential to improve the life outcomes of foster care alumni. Therefore, cross-national analyses following care leavers into mid-adulthood could clarify how diverse policies such as tuition waivers and educational support services shape long-term educational pathways. Future work could also investigate the intergenerational effects of higher education, given evidence linking educational attainment to reduced child welfare involvement among the next generation (Brännström et al., 2017). Identity-based analyses are mostly conducted in isolation, such as individual studies of race, ethnicity (Harris et al., 2009; O'Brien et al., 2010), or immigration status (Achdut et al., 2022; Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2022). Conversely, larger data sets built with intersectional frameworks would allow researchers to examine how multiple dimensions of disadvantage interact. Policy shifts, austerity measures, and cohort differences could be examined for how they influence long-term educational outcomes as well.

Future research directions in employment and financial well-being

The current outcome literature on employment and income for care-experienced adults has similar room to advance knowledge of life course trajectories, intersectional realities, and create interventions that increase employment and economic resilience. To document financial outcomes more holistically, researchers could better examine mid-life employment and economic needs and realities. They could also plan better for intersectional analyses, by expanding longitudinal cohorts and ensuring inclusive recruitment of care-leavers with diverse placement, disability, and identity statuses. Future intervention-based research could prioritise the creation of strategies and pilot programs that support care-leavers' entry and navigation in the workforce. Additionally, measuring aspects of employment quality such as living-wage employment, job satisfaction, and intent to change employers (Bakketeig, et al., 2020; Boddy et al., 2020) could provide meaningful insights that are under-documented in the current literature. Likewise, qualitative studies could be developed in

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collaboration with care-experienced people to holistically capture care-experienced adults' financial, housing, and employment experiences.

Conclusion

This scoping review demonstrates that care experience is associated with enduring life-course impacts on education and employment. However, trajectories are heterogeneous, with evidence of both persistent disadvantage and delayed integration. Care-experienced adults' resilience is also clear from the evidence of later workforce and educational integration, which is poorly captured in the emerging adulthood studies. These adults who pursue education or feel ready to work at mid-life may face continued structural barriers precisely when they are developmentally and economically positioned to advance their lives, with most support programming ending by age 25. Extending research and policy beyond early adulthood is essential not only to document long-term outcomes more accurately but also to inform policies and interventions that can reduce preventable hardships for care-experienced people.

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Appendix: Characteristics and key findings of included research papers

Author(year)	***Country***	***Data set***	***Age***	***Placement Type***	***Aged out***	***Employment***	***Education***	***Income***
Achdut et al. (2022a).	Israel	Israeli youth villages alumni	21-34	Group care	All aged out	yes	yes	yes
Achdut et al (2022b).	Israel	Israeli youth villages alumni	24-31	Foster care	All aged out	yes	yes	yes

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Author(year)	*Country*	*Data set*	*Age*	*Placement Type*	*Aged out*	*Employment*	*Education*	*Income*
Anctil (2007)	USA	Casey National Alumni Study (CNAS)	Average age 30.	Group care	no	yes	yes	yes
Artamonova (2020).	Portugal	Portuguese-Artamonova	25-80	All types of placements	no	No	yes	no
Bakketeig et al. (2020).	Norway, Denmark and England.	Against All Odds	16-32	Unclear	no	no	no	yes
Boddy et al. (2020).	Norway, Denmark and England.	Against All Odds	16–32	All types of placements	unclear	yes	yes	yes,
Brady, E., & Gilligan, (2019)	Ireland	Brady & Gilligan Life course study	24–36	All types of placements	no	no	yes	no
Brady, E., & Gilligan, R. (2020a).	Ireland	Brady & Gilligan Life course study.	24 to 36	All types of placements	unclear	no	yes	no
Brady, E., & Gilligan, R. (2020b).	Ireland	Brady & Gilligan Life course study	24-36	unclear	no	no	yes	no
Brännström (2020).	Sweden	Stockholm Birth Cohort (SBC) study.	50	Unclear	no	yes	yes	yes
Brännström (2022)	Sweden	Stockholm Birth Cohort (SBC) study	39–55	Unclear	no	yes	yes	yes
Brännström (2017)	Sweden	Stockholm Birth Cohort (SBC) study	39-55	Unclear	no	yes	yes	yes
Brännström, L. et al. (2020)	Sweden	Swedish Board of Health & Welfare	30–39	All types	no	yes	yes	no
Cameron, C., et al. (2018)	England, Germany, Finland	British & Finnish & German Cohort Study	30	unclear	no	yes	yes	yes
Cooley, et al. (2018)	USA	Administrative data	18-65	All types and controlled for	no	yes	no	no

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Author(year)	*Country*	*Data set*	*Age*	*Placement Type*	*Aged out*	*Employment*	*Education*	*Income*
Fernandez et al. 2017	Australia	Stolen Generations study	45-75+	Foster care	Around half aged out.	yes	yes	yes
Harris, et al. (2009)	USA	Casey National Alumni Study (CNAS)	20-49	Foster care	no	yes	yes	yes
Jackson Foster, et al. (2015).	USA	Casey National Alumni Study	20-49	Unclear	no	yes	yes	yes
Kaspar (2014). Et al.	Canada	2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey & Métis Supplement	25-55+	Group care	no	yes	yes	yes
McKenzie (2003).	USA	MacKenzie US Orphanage Alumni	47-95	Foster care	most aged out	yes	yes	yes
O'Brien (2010).	USA	Casey National Alumni Study (CNAS)	20-49	All types	no	yes	yes	yes
Okpych, & Courtney (2021)	USA	Midwest Study	29-30	Unclear	all aged out	yes	yes	no
Österberg, et al. (2018).	Sweden	Foster Children Panel Study	25-35	All types	no	yes	Control variable	yes
Pecora (2006).	USA	Northwest Cohort	20-33	Foster care	no	yes	yes	yes
Pecora et al. (2006b).	USA	Casey National Alumni Study	20 - 51	All types and controlled for	no	no	yes	no
Sacker et al. (2022).	UK	Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study	20-49	All types	no	yes	no	yes

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ISSN 2976-9353 (Online)
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Author(year)	*Country*	*Data set*	*Age*	*Placement Type*	*Aged out*	*Employment*	*Education*	*Income*
Schneider et al. (2009).	USA	California Women's Health Survey	18-65+	All types	no	yes	yes	yes
Stewart et al. (2014)	USA	Administrative data	18-30	Group care	yes	yes	yes	yes
Tatsiopoulou, et al. (2020).	Greece	Original Dataset	20-79	Foster care	no	yes	yes	yes
Villegas et al. (2014).	USA	Casey National Alumni Study (CNAS)	20-49	Group care	no	no	yes	no
Sulimani-Aidan, et al. (2022).	Israel	Israeli youth villages alumni	24-31	Group care	most aged out	yes	yes	yes
Zlotnick, et al. (2012).	USA	California Health Interview Survey (CHIS).	18-55	Group care	no	yes	no	yes

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