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**Residential Childcare:  
The Experiences of Young People in Bangladesh**

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**Doctor of Philosophy  
The University of Edinburgh  
2012**

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is originally composed by me. It is based on my own work, with acknowledgements of other sources, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, except part of chapter two, which was developed from my Masters dissertation entitled, 'Rehabilitation of Young Care Leavers: Reality and Challenges in Bangladesh, Messages from Research Studies and Practices in the UK', submitted to the University of East Anglia, 2002.

.....

Md. Tuhinul Islam  
June 2012

*To my late mother-in-law who always believed in me.*

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## Abstract

Residential childcare has had an image which, at the very least, is not a positive one. It has been blamed for weakening family links and leading to poor educational and health outcomes for children (Biehal *et al.* 1995; Mendes and Moslehuddin 2004; Stein 2002). However, children and young people enter residential care institutions for a variety of reasons, and by examining the experiences of children and young people in Bangladesh, we can see that residential childcare has the potential to offer a positive option for many disadvantaged children and young people.

UNICEF estimates that there are more than 49,000 children in residential care in Bangladesh (UNICEF 2008), but this figure fails to include thousands of children who live in madrasahs. There is neither a uniform childcare policy nor formal aftercare support provision in Bangladesh; instead, the government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and madrasahs all have their own approaches and methods and there has been no research conducted on young people in and after care. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of residential care from the perspectives of a group of young people who had lived in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh with a view to making improvements in residential childcare in the future.

Qualitative methods were employed for data collection, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 33 young people (aged between 12 and 26) who had left the care system and observation of the four institutions where they had lived: one run by an NGO, two run by the government and one madrasah run by the religious community. All of the fieldwork was conducted and transcribed in Bangla.

The findings of this study show that young people had mixed feelings about their lives in care, preparation for leaving care, and aftercare support; moreover, their experiences were diverse. Overall, most said that they had benefited from being in care and the institution had had a largely positive impact on their lives. However, the experience for those who had been evicted was much less favourable; these young people suffered a range of hardships after leaving care.

The findings also show that there was a connection between the in-care experience and the success of a young person in the outside world. The type of institution, its culture, systems and practices, the amount of care received and socio-cultural-religious influences all played a part. The research further indicated that although some young people developed a measure of resilience to face the problems of their everyday lives, they were not fully able to overcome them due to societal discrimination. Those who did best were those who had developed positive attachments with at least one trusted adult, who acted as a mentor and strengthened their commitment and self-motivation. The findings demonstrate that aftercare support varied from institution to institution, but overall, was informal in nature.

The study concludes by setting out implications for building better residential childcare policy and practice in Bangladesh. It identifies a number of avenues for further research, suggesting that lessons for the minority world may be learned from this study, namely the notion that the whole community should take responsibility for its children; and attention should be paid to faith and religious beliefs in children's upbringing. The study has also demonstrated that improving financial resources may not necessarily lead to better outcomes from children and young people. Instead, building relationships with adults, peer groups, parents, and community offer the best chance for good outcomes.

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# Introduction, Background and Research Questions

## 1.1. Introduction

This study aims to explore young people's experiences of care, leaving care and aftercare from their own perspectives. It presents the experiences of young people after they had left care, comparing experiences, processes and outcomes in relation to four residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh: one run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), two run by the government and one run by the religious community (madrasah). In order to make sense of the findings, the thesis begins by discussing how I came to carry out this study and why.

I would like, firstly, to draw attention to terminology used in the thesis. The term 'majority' world is used in preference to that of 'developing' countries throughout the thesis, because it is a statement of fact about numbers of people in the world, carrying no connotation that poorer countries of the world are somehow lacking in something (Punch 2003). However, at various points, I have used the terms 'developed', 'developing', 'global North', 'global South' and 'Western' to refer to the 'minority' and 'majority' worlds where these terms have been used by other scholars.

## 1.2. Background and Rationale of the Study

My interest in the experiences of young people leaving residential care stemmed from my professional experience in Bangladesh. While at university, I volunteered at a local NGO that offered educational classes to slum dwellers and street children. I tried to inspire the children towards learning, helping them with their schoolwork, and organising activities such as recreational singing and dancing sessions. I got involved with the NGO's safe drinking water and sanitation, health and hygiene and adult literacy programmes for slum dwellers. All this gave me a sense of achievement. My middle-class prejudice was amazed to see that such children were able to learn their lessons with minimum guidance, appreciate the benefits they received and make maximum use of them. I found them active, creative and fun-

loving. Moreover, I noted that the whole slum-dwelling community supported each other, even though they had many problems. This experience created in me a desire to help to alleviate the suffering of such marginalised groups.

Something that had a profound effect on me was a painting drawn by a young girl at an education centre which I visited for the first time. The painting was not brightly coloured, yet it stood out from all the paintings done by the children. I asked the girl to explain it to me, and she told me that it was a reflection of her life and her family's story of poverty. The picture contained many sections: where her family members slept, what they did when it rained, the relationship between her family and the wider community. There was a section showing how her elder brother had died. It also showed her aspirations for the future: she wanted to be 'rich and a specialist doctor'; to help others by saving lives. Everyone in the centre was silenced as she explained her picture, and I could not help but become emotional. As I was about to leave the centre, a young boy of seven or eight years came up to me and said, 'many people come to visit our centre and our homes in the slum. They too cry like you, but their tears do not change our lives.... If we were your sons or daughters, nephews or nieces, what would you do for us? You live in the city, earn lots of money and enjoy life. You don't have time for us except to look and take pity. People like you come and go, again and again'.

I was moved by the frankness of this child and heard the seriousness with which he spoke. I felt embarrassed and shocked, and could give no reply. I was both touched and disturbed by the whole experience: the girl's painting and the boy's questioning. I could not sleep over the next few nights. I wanted to do something for these children, but did not know what. I shared my thoughts with family and friends but could not reach any decision. Although life carried on, the feelings of that day remained locked in my heart.

After graduating, I worked for several years in the forestry, development and environmental sector, but my enthusiasm for the sector began to wane and I resigned. During a period of unemployment, a friend who worked in child welfare helped me

to get a position in a project working with the children of sex workers. This was how I entered the world of child and social welfare work. At that time, I had little idea of what social work was really about, but it was the beginning of working towards answering the question posed by that young boy from the children's centre many years before, when he had asked me what I could do for children like him to make their lives better.

Later, I was promoted to Assistant Director of an NGO and became the Head of its Education and Child Development Programme. Under this Programme, there were several projects for children and their families, mostly for disadvantaged groups, including a residential home for the children of sex workers. I loved this work and decided to continue to working in this field.

My fundamental desire in working with such children and their families was seeing the tangible results of my efforts and the impact which they had on the lives of the young people and their families. I felt a sense of achievement when mothers agreed to take their children out of the brothel and admit them into the children's home. We felt that we had prevented a child from falling into the sex industry and a life of crime. We were providing children with a safe abode in our residential home. It was rewarding to see the lives of children and their families improve.

On the downside however, I witnessed many children being evicted by our staff due to breaking home rules or choosing to leave the home through their own volition. I did not know exactly where such children went after leaving or how they survived, except through piecemeal information gained from colleagues working in the brothels. It was upsetting to see children leaving or being removed from the care home, for whatever reason, and I became frustrated at not being able to support them. They had been provided with good facilities: food, accommodation and education which many ordinary Bangladeshi children from poor backgrounds could hardly dream of. Furthermore, as the Head of Programme, I failed to note any significant positive outcomes from these young people, even after spending large amounts of money on them. Our only real achievement seemed to be rescuing them from a

physically and psychologically abusive brothel environment, which I believe in itself was no mean feat since otherwise they might have ended up in sex work, with a drug addiction or involved with the brothel mafia and risking their lives.

During this time, the eviction of one girl created havoc for the organisation. The mother of the girl threatened to sue us for evicting her daughter. The reason for her expulsion was that she posed a threat to the other children in the home, and to the future of the children's home in the local community. Its reputation was possibly in jeopardy. We managed to settle the matter out of court with the help of the police. We had to pay compensation to the girl's mother and also bribe the police to stop the case. The incident with the police seriously knocked my fundamental beliefs in what I was doing as the Assistant Director of the organisation. I asked myself whether I was doing this work for my own interest, the organisation's interest or the children's interest? I was informed by colleagues that residential childcare was a highly complex task, especially working with the children of sex-workers, because they were 'different' from other children. There was no single 'quick fix' which would solve all the issues they had to deal with. However, questions remained in my mind as to what the reasons were for such a high turnover of children.

At the NGO we tried to understand more about children who left care earlier than usual. Research on residential care for sex workers' children in Bangladesh was lacking. Although my colleagues carried out some internal evaluations, I found the results unsatisfactory and tried to find my own answers as to why the staff felt the need to force children out, or why children were not happy living there. I decided to spend some time in the children's home to get a clearer picture about why children were being evicted and what the reasons were for conflicts between staff and children. I found that conflict started between staff and children when staff did not respect children's wishes and failed to fulfil their material and emotional needs; when neither staff nor children accepted constructive criticism from each other; or when children did not respect the home's rules and regulations. In addition, some of the staff's negative attitudes towards children and their mothers fuelled conflict. Most staff members were not trained in handling complex problems, causing conflict

between staff, children and sometimes mothers and the community. All these issues created situations where children had to leave the home. I also found that neighbours and people from the community were hostile towards the children because of their birth identity and their mothers' occupation. The community felt that the presence of sex-workers' children and their mothers in their community was a risk because they spoilt the community's image of itself and could potentially spoil their children. They demanded the closure of the children's home. Negative reporting by a local newspaper highlighting sex-workers and their children's moral decline, their involvement in human trafficking, drug selling and other criminal activities, and the potential of problems from the sex workers and their children posing a danger to the community and society all compounded hostility. Finally, when we carried out evaluations of the project, researched and analysed the situations, we knew that we were not completely neutral due to our 'commitment to the organisation' and the expectations and limitations prescribed by our funding donors, as well as a general lack of scientific social research experience on our part.

During this time, I visited several childcare institutions run by the government and the community to understand how they functioned. As soon I walked into one institution, I picked up a strong sense that even though children were not receiving adequate food, and their lodgings were poor, yet, they seemed cared for and to be receiving an education. Other institutions appeared to have eviction rates similar to ours. Although these childcare institutions were completely different from ours, I developed a strong desire to understand how children benefited (or not) from the varied practices.

Later, during my Masters Course in International Child Welfare at the University of East Anglia, I was introduced for the first time to research on residential childcare. This showed me that young people around the world entered residential care for a variety of reasons. Despite support being offered, many faced a multitude of problems both during and after leaving care. Much of the research published supported my concerns, that is, that care leavers felt stigmatised by care (Stein 2002), leading them towards involvement in anti-social activities such as drug abuse and

prostitution (Bonnerjea 1990; Stein 1999). Other research, however, confirmed that residential care was not in itself a negative experience and could lead to higher achievements in life. Group care in residential homes was found to help children to develop social networks, confidence, negotiation and presentation skills, group norms and values (Ayoub Ali 1983; Berridge and Brodie 1998; Crimmens and Milligan 2005; Emond 2004). Martin and Jackson (2002) found that some 'high achievers' from residential care backgrounds did well in higher education, when they received similar kinds of support as when they were in residential care. A study by Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) showed that there was a relationship between the quality of residential childcare staff and young people's outcomes. Moreover, Tolfree's (1995) research suggested that residential childcare institutions' practice in preparing young people for leaving care was not the only factor in poor outcomes for young people. Fulcher (1998) argued that the relationship between residential childcare institutional practice and poor outcomes is complex and depends both on the individual and the cultural context.

In spite of extensive research on residential childcare, little had been written from the personal viewpoints of young care leavers. There were also questions remaining for me about the extent to which such studies reflected bio-psycho-social perspectives that fitted a 'Western' (minority world) viewpoint, rather than a 'non-Western' (majority world) context (Fulcher 2001). My work experience inspired me to explore this further. These were significant issues for international child welfare, and so I decided to undertake a PhD with a view to making what I hoped might be a contribution to improving Bangladeshi residential childcare institutions in the future.

### **1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of leaving care from the perspectives of young people who have lived in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate the experiences of children who had lived in four different residential childcare institutions in order to explore differences and

similarities: one run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), two run by the government and one run by a religious community (the madrasah).

2. To examine the relationship between young people's present lives and their care experiences.
3. To develop an understanding of the practices employed by these four institutions in preparing young people for leaving care.
4. To present the findings of this research with a view to improving provision for young people in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh, in other comparable minority world countries, and globally.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

The research questions were:

1. How do young people view the residential childcare institution, its usefulness to them and the existing systems and practices to help them leave care?
2. What are the experiences of young people in relation to joining society?
  - What are the key issues they face?
  - How do they address these issues?
  - Do they receive any institutional/organizational support to overcome the barriers which they face?
  - What are the factors that aid or hinder them in moving on from care?
3. What is the impact of residential care on young people's lives and what are their perceptions of residential childcare services?
4. What are the comparative levels of achievement (e.g. education, health, relationships and social networks) of young people from these selected residential childcare institutions? If they are different, why?

The research strategies adopted reflect a variety of qualitative methods. Adopting an ethnographic approach, participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to understand the experiences of young people leaving care.

## **1.5. The Study Site**

The research was conducted in one upazila (administrative sub-district) in one district of Bangladesh. The study site was selected because of my familiarity with the area and its variety of residential childcare institutions. In other parts of Bangladesh, government-run residential institutions and madrasahs for marginalised children have existed for decades; however, homes set up primarily for the children of sex workers are comparatively new. The district not only has a longstanding NGO institution for sex workers' children, but also has longstanding government institutions, as well as a community-run madrasah. In addition, this upazila is in the centre of the district and has a number of good facilities for education, work, healthcare and other essentials. With my already-established local contacts, it was feasible to reach young people who had left care for my research.

## **1.6. A Map of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. Chapter One presents the background against which my study was set, the aims and objectives of the study and introduces the research context. Chapter Two discusses a number of concepts and theories pertinent to institutional childcare in order to develop a theoretical framework informing the research. The chapter also explores evidence from research on residential childcare, primarily drawing on British literature, but also including findings from Bangladesh where these exist. Chapter Three provides a demographic and social picture of Bangladesh and describes Bangladeshi child welfare and child protection policies and childcare institutions to set the context of the research.

Chapter Four moves onto the empirical research and the research methodology. This is followed by an account of the steps taken to gain access to the institutions and young people. The chapter then describes the mechanics of data collection, from planning to practice, data analysis, reliability and validity and triangulation. A number of ethical and practical issues raised during the fieldwork are presented. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on my research experience. Chapter Five then introduces the young people who participated in the study and describes four residential childcare institutions which were selected for the study to help to

understand childcare institutions in Bangladesh and their daily routines, rituals and rhythms and environment.

Chapters Six to Nine present the main findings from the research. Chapter Six examines the educational experiences of the young people, with particular focus on how the institutional practices promoted or hindered their preparation for leaving care. Chapter Seven explores the healthcare experiences of the young people. It discusses how the healthcare needs of children in the different institutions were met and how the existing healthcare practices, organisational cultures and resources impacted on the growing process of the children and contributed to their preparation for leaving care. Chapter Eight examines the institutional practices for the personal development of young people and how this influences their personal relationships, identity and social network after leaving care. It also analyses why some young people had positive experiences and some had negative experiences after leaving care and the factors associated with positive or negative experiences. Chapter Nine describes young people's experiences of preparation for leaving care and moving on from the institutions. It gives an account of their outcomes and discusses the young people's experiences of aftercare and the impact on their life of being from an institution.

Chapter Ten discusses the strengths and limitations of the study and reviews the key findings from the research. It also revisits the main theoretical concepts. I reflect on my study as a whole and conclude with personal thoughts on the development of future policy and practice in Bangladesh, and globally. Finally, further possible research areas in the field are identified.

## **1.7. Summary**

This introductory chapter has presented the background and rationale of my study, outlining the research aims and objectives and the research questions and has introduced the research site. The next chapter will discuss different theoretical concepts and the approach which I have used in my research. It also examines existing research findings on the leaving-care experiences of children and young people.

# Childhood, Children's Needs and Rights and Young People's Experiences of Care: Literature Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter covers two broad areas: firstly, the theoretical ideas underpinning the study and secondly, existing research findings on the leaving care experiences of children and young people. I will begin by exploring the concepts of 'child' and 'childhood', taking the stance that childhood is socially constructed and that children are experts in their own lives. I will then discuss the concept of the 'needs of children' (as applied by twentieth-century developmental psychologists) and the concept of 'child rights' (as developed by lawyers to protect vulnerable children within a legal framework). I then consider attachment and resilience, two key theories that have had a major influence on childcare research, policy and practice. Finally, I discuss ecological systems theory as a way of understanding individual children more fully in their context. The chapter concludes by reviewing literature mainly from the UK on young people's experiences of care and after care, with some attention to Bangladeshi and South Asian research where this exists.

## 2.2. Understandings of Children and Childhood

In order to explain the experiences of children and young people leaving residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh we must first understand the concept of 'child' and 'childhood'. So, what is a 'child'? There is no absolute answer to this question, and a number of factors affect it: chronological age, physical size, gender and social class (Cree 2010; Leonard 2005; Rogers 2003) and it changes over time and place (Myers and Boyden 1998).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as any person under the age of 18 (Article 1). Each member country has agreed to this definition by signing the convention. However, Article 12 of the UNCRC recognises different stages of childhood and has allowed each member state to ratify and amend Articles to take into account their own particular domestic situation: laws,

socio-economic conditions, political situation, customs and practices. The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention 182 has defined child as anyone under the age of 18 while Convention 138 acknowledges a basic minimum age at which children can start formal paid work: age 15 for the developed and age 14 for the developing world. Woodhead and Montgomery (2003) criticise age-based definitions doubting their applicability in different cultural contexts. Boyden *et al.* (1998: 195) state that the minimum age standard set by the convention 'expresses an ideal of childhood as a privileged phase of life properly dedicated only to play and schooling, and with an extended period of dependence during which economic activity is discouraged or actually denied'. Critics such as White (2002) question the logic of trying to define a child when the reality is so different in different settings, for example, when large numbers of adults and children are dying from disease, starvation and/or war.

As we learn that there is no universal definition of 'a child', similarly, the concept and definition of 'childhood' is not straightforward to define either. There was little sociological interest in the notion of childhood pre-1970s: until then both socialisation theories and sociological studies of childhood had a marginal view of children, with little recognition of their own rights (Corsaro 2004); children's lives were largely understood to be determined by adult others (Brannen and O'Brien 1996). It is increasingly becoming acknowledged that 'childhood' is a contested concept, not a fixed category existing between children's own experiences of being children and institutional concepts of the ideal childhood (James and Prout 1990; James 1993; Mayall 2002; Woodhead 2009). The contemporary sociology of childhood views children's social relationships and cultures as worthy of study in their own right, not just in relation to their social construction by adults (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Sociologists have been critical of the presentation of childhood as 'a time of ignorance and innocence, a time of passive learning from adults ... a time of freedom and play' (Bourdillon 2000:19; see also Ennew 1996). It is argued instead that childhood is both socially and culturally constructed (James and Prout 1990; Punch 2003) and that a diversity of childhoods exists, both between and within societal cultures and settings (Morrow 2003). Social and cultural

phenomena, such as changes in family systems; modes of production; crises; scientific and technological advancements (Pattnaik 2005: 239) as well as power structures related to social class, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, age and birth order, family background, educational status and traditional customs hugely affect and frame concepts, experiences and perceptions of childhood (Bourdillon 2000; Morrow 2003; Punch 2003). Additionally, it is argued that societal expectations of children from particular socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and societal expectations of gender roles affect how people engage with children, thus affecting how they themselves develop, enact and experience their identities (James 1999). Within this, the plurality of childhood is acknowledged, as Schaffer (2009:13) states:

[childhood] is relative to the socio-economic conditions of each society, to the current state of medical and scientific knowledge and to the religious and philosophical dogmas to which most people subscribe at that time. Each society, that is, constructs its own image of childhood, and the needs and abilities ascribed to children, the forces that account for developmental change and hence also the role caretakers are supposed to fulfil – all these are to a large extent a function of that image.

Although contemporary society may hold to the notion that an ‘ideal childhood’ is both necessary and attainable, others argue that it is not possible to apply this notion to children’s lives and experiences around the world (Bissell 2003; Cree 2010; Punch 2003; Schaffer 2009; Woodhead 1999). Moreover, Boyden *et al.* (1998:195) state that ‘there is no scientific evidence that this particular sort of childhood produces children who are happier, better adjusted, or more fully developed than do other types of childhood’. Moreover, the concept of an ideal childhood (‘childhood=play and adulthood=work’) does not translate easily from the minority world to the majority world or even within both these ‘world-views’. There are significant differences between poor and rich, literate and illiterate, faith and non-faith children even in developed countries. A good example is that of the Amish community in the USA. Amish children are encouraged to start work on family-run enterprises at the age of seven and eight, and get ‘home schooling’ up to a level that the community feels important for survival. The community does not see work as work, but rather as skills-acquisition, necessary for survival. Compared to Western and modern notions

of the 'ideal childhood', the Amish children's childhood could be called 'abnormal', yet neither parents nor children seem to see these practices as abnormal or bad; rather, they are part of life, necessary for survival (BBC Channel 4, documentary series: *Living with the Amish*, aired December 2011). Similarly as I shall discuss later, the meaning of 'childhood' is very different for children in childcare institutions in Bangladesh, due to varying residential arrangements, institutional and cultural values and beliefs and support mechanisms.

So when does childhood cease? The official 'global social construction' of the ideal childhood has no exact answer to this. Society defines childhood according to its cultural values and religious beliefs and practices (Schaffer 2009; Stephens 1995). In some nation-states, adulthood is associated with legal entitlement, that is, to work, marry, vote, buy alcohol, drive, claim welfare benefits, or be charged with certain crimes. Cross-cultural studies also reject the idea of a single or universal phenomenon of childhood (Blanchet 1996; Katz 1991, 1993; Liebel 2004; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Onta-Bhatta 2001; Okoli 2009; Punch 2003; Twum-Danso 2010) because experiences, expectations and understandings of childhood are fluid and diverse (Morrow 2003) and so very much guided by the times: their socio-economic, religio-cultural and political conditions. Because of this, in some societies, childhood is shortened while in others it is extended, sometimes even into a person's 40s (Twum-Danso 2010). Some societies determine the end of childhood by physical growth and changes, for example, in Muslim societies like Bangladesh, where childhood ends with the onset of puberty, that is, menstruation for girls and facial hair growth and deepening of voice for boys.

In summary, the concepts of 'child' and 'childhood' vary considerably in different parts of the world and within individual countries; childhood is best understood as socially and culturally constructed. To truly understand children's experiences and childhoods, we must therefore ask children what they think, because they are experts in their own lives. I will now go on to consider another major theoretical strand in the research: children's needs and rights.

### **2.3. Understandings of the Needs and Rights of Children**

Two key bodies of knowledge have informed our understandings of children. The first draws on psychological theory and is concerned with children's needs. The second builds from legal perspectives and forefronts the idea of children's rights.

#### **Children's Needs**

Every child, and indeed every person, is unique. Yet we all, as humans, have a number of needs that are common to us all. Individual needs have been documented by various commentators, the most influential being Maslow's (1970) pyramid of universal needs. He outlined a hierarchy of needs based on human motivation. His model identified five sets working upwards: physiological (food, warmth, shelter) at the base; security (protection from danger and deprivation); social (companionship, communal activities); egotistical (self-esteem and sense of achievement); finally psychological (self-actualisation) at the peak. He argued that a person would only be concerned with the higher needs of self-esteem and personal growth once the lower order of physical and emotional needs were met. Assuming that all needs were met, the result would be a fully functioning, motivated and self-fulfilled individual (Gross 2005). Nonetheless, Maslow noted that the higher the need, the more resources were required to satisfy it. Subsequently a distinction was made between behaviours linked to deficiency needs (those necessary for survival) and behaviours linked to growth needs (those carried out for satisfaction) (Gross 2005).

Doyal and Gough (1991) list the minimum level of provision needed for a population to thrive: clean water; adequate nutrition; adequate protection and housing; a non-hazardous work environment; appropriate healthcare; security in childhood; significant primary relationships; physical security; appropriate education; safe birth control and child-bearing. Bradshaw (1972), on the other hand, suggests that the definition of need might be more complex than minimum standards. He outlines four dimensions: normative needs (needs that most experts define for a population); felt needs (what people say they need); expressed needs (what people demand by their actions); comparative needs (needs established by comparing one group with another).

Every child is also unique. Yet at a basic level they have similar developmental needs and require certain fundamental resources to be made available to them: food, clothing, shelter, emotional support, intellectual stimulation and social interaction. Black (1990) cites physical care, affection, security, stimulation, innate potential, guidance and control, responsibility and independence as most important for children's development. Kellmer Pringle's (1974:86) influential study lists children's developmental needs as: love and security, new experiences, praise and recognition, and responsibility. She argues that children require adequate opportunities to experience new things and to learn social skills. Children also need praise, recognition and reassurance to develop their self-esteem, positive self-image, confidence and determination.

Bryer (1988) has developed a broader approach of 'people's needs', using the five headings: physical, social, emotional, educational/intellectual and ethical. She expands these five broad headings into eighty-seven different categories of need. She argues that these needs must be met, both in childhood and throughout life, if we want people to become confident individuals, effective contributors to society, successful learners and responsible citizens. Children, for their part, require a stimulating physical, spiritual and social environment. The family is said to provide the bulk of this for most children, along with school and friends; in residential care homes, staff and the institutional mechanisms are charged to provide this.

A powerful insight in developmental theory, however, which is particularly pertinent to those who are involved in child welfare, is the idea that child development is not simply a matter of focusing on what happens to individual children or even what happens in their family setting. Rather, children must be understood within their wider context. The UK Department of Health *et al.*'s (2000) assessment framework demonstrates this broader understanding, suggesting that children's developmental needs must be seen alongside parental capacities and wider family and environmental factors. The framework highlights seven interlocking dimensions for assessing children's developmental needs: health; education; emotional and behavioural development; identity; family and social relationships; social presentation and self-

care skills. Within each dimension, children have a range of different and complex developmental needs that must be met either by themselves or by parental figures (Ward 2001:168). Parker *et al.* (1991) note that children who experience discrimination will require additional support needs to develop a positive sense of self and acquire self-care skills.

Pringle's idea of responsibility and Maslow's idea of self-actualisation have been criticised because they are 'Western' ideals based on an assumption of the value of individualism that may not be accepted across the world. Woodhead (1997:75) argues that statements of 'children's needs' are muddled between facts and values, stating that a 'need' is psychological in nature and can be culturally adaptive; assumptions about children's needs are therefore dependent on socio-economic, cultural and/or religious contexts. Woodhead also argues that a conventional list drawn up by adult researchers may omit the needs that children themselves might identify as being important for them. Hence, we need to remember that:

Many assumptions about children's needs are dependent on the cultural context and there is often room for more than one point of view. Although children's needs are usually discussed in developmental terms, children are people living in the present, not simply pre-adults in the process of development (Thomas 2005: 6).

### **Children's Rights**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was set up in 1990 to promote and protect children worldwide and as such is the world's most broadly accepted child welfare treaty. UNCRC states that all children have a right to education, healthcare, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure, and adequate standards of living. Children have the right to be safe from discrimination, physical abuse and exploitation. The CRC has four guiding principles:

- All rights apply to children without exception or discrimination of any kind (Article 2: Non- Discrimination).
- The best interests of children must be paramount in all actions concerning children (Article 3: The Best Interest of the Child).

- Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development (Article 6: Survival and Development).
- Children's views must be taken into consideration in all matters affecting them (Article 12: Children's Participation and opinion).

The UNCRC recognises that children need adult support in their growth, development and protection throughout their childhood stage, thus the family is very important in a child's life. Articles 20 and 21, however, specifically address the State as having the responsibility for supporting the provision of alternative care when children are deprived of parental care. Bangladesh was one of the first signatories of the UNCRC, and the Bangladeshi government and NGO residential childcare institutions are generally established in line with these principles.

Although the UN convention is a universally ratified document for child protection and development, in many countries, children's rights are 'squared' at the advocacy and campaigning level and used as an awareness-raising tool. This does not, however, imply that they are a foundation for practice (Veerman 1992:184). Local definitions of children's rights are often different from those found in textbooks and UN resolutions, due to differences in context, culture, religious belief and above all, socio-economic conditions. This means that, in reality, people at all levels 'sign up' to what they feel comfortable with, and may be unaware of the larger context. Many children, parents and guardians in majority world countries such as Bangladesh have no knowledge of the notion of children's rights. Many staff in the residential childcare institutions also lack knowledge about children's rights (Vrouwenfelder 2006) or perhaps do not think children's rights are important for the children for whom they care for. Smith (2009) argues that this is not because adults want to maintain their power over children. Rather in a residential childcare setting, the whole concept of children's rights is neither neutral nor unproblematic in conceptual and practical terms.

The UN Convention continues to attract considerable debate and controversy. Some argue that children's rights are already covered by human rights; others contend that the vulnerability of children necessitates a separate bill of rights (Vrouwenfelder 2006; Woodhead and Montgomery 2003). Some critics challenge the concept of childhood and rights underlying the convention. Ennew (1995) argues that the UN convention emphasises family, overlooking other social settings. Also, the convention does not create a definitive hierarchy of children's rights; rather 'a child's best interests' model is used in practice to qualify a variety of other rights (Hill and Tisdall 1997:32; Thomas 2005). Again, different cultures carry different assumptions about what is in the best interests of the child. Who decides what is in a child's best interest? Is it 'experts', family members, adults or the children themselves? (Eekelaar 1994; Marshall 1995; Reppucci and Crosby 1993; Thomas 2005).

Goodman (1996) argues that since a major part of UN international legislation was developed using 'Western' ideologies, this lead to gaps between local understandings, practices, values, beliefs and those of the international legislation around the world. In line with this, Hill and Tisdall (1997) and Montgomery (2003) suggest that the Euro-centric influences create confusion in values and a lack of interest in enforcing rules in 'non-Western' countries such as Bangladesh, where 'Western' origins of the UN Convention can lead to fear and suspicion, especially for faith-based residential childcare institutions whose procedures are directed by Qur'an and Hadith.

Finally, it has been argued that imposing the UNCRC on residential childcare means that we see relationships between children and adult carers from a legal standpoint where concepts of love, affection, empathy and sympathy are seen as suspect. Human qualities or 'life space' factors that increase developmental pathways are undermined by legislation; legal justifications tend to increase tensions and mistrust between children and care workers in residential settings where the situation is often complex (Emond 2008:185). Heron and Chakrabarti (2002:356) argue that 'the superficiality of the rights agenda has added to the complexities and tensions

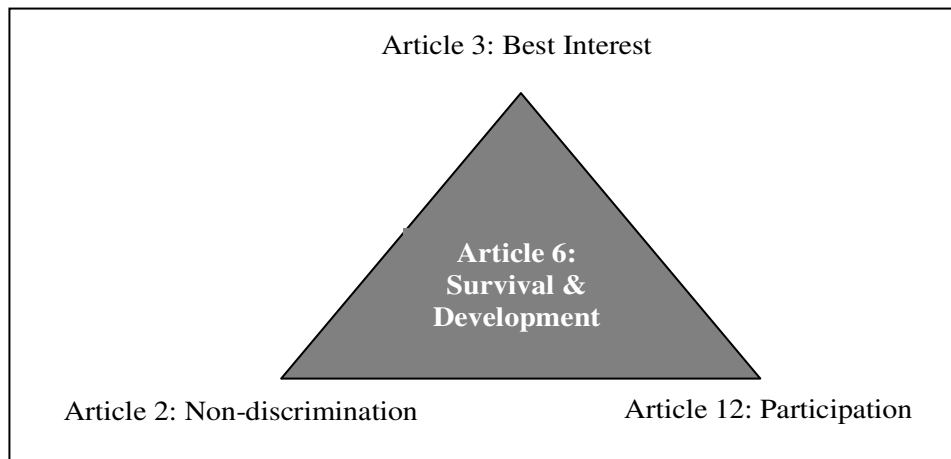
permeating residential provision’ and has ‘undermined practitioner morale in the process’.

Despite its limitations, the UN Convention has galvanised signatory countries across the world to implement children’s rights, or at least has put moral pressure on countries to improve practice in the light of children’s rights (Hill and Tisdall 1997:33). Bequele and Boyden (1995) suggest that we must consider the realities and cultural values of people in different societies. Smith (2009:12) also notes:

The rights we should be pursuing for children would enable them to enter into relationships with caring adults that are mutually respectful. This requires a culture of respect for human rights, including those of adult carers.

To support his argument, he refers to Emond’s understanding of residential childcare which requires a move beyond current rights discourses. These ‘may be seen as a product of a society which seeks to measure and monitor that which is intrinsically qualitative in nature; love, respect, security, trust, reliability and responsiveness’ (Emond 2008:193). Smith (2009:12) further suggests that ‘it means that adults need to start enjoying and celebrating children rather than fearing and seeking to control them within a rubric of contractual obligations, rules and technologies of care’.

Reviewing the discussion as a whole, in spite of the criticism of the UNCRC, there are nevertheless features of a rights-based approach that are helpful in residential childcare. Vrouwenfelder (2006:3) argues that a rights-based approach should not be seen as contradictory to existing methods of practice; rather it ‘is an overarching framework, which complements existing ways of working in childcare’. Using Save the Children’s ‘Triangle of Rights’ model (Figure 2.1), she points out that the guiding principles of the UNCRC (‘non-discrimination’, ‘best interests of the child’ and ‘participation of the child’) are important for children’s well-being. When the triangle is imbalanced, there is a greater risk of jeopardising the ‘right to life, survival and development’, the fourth core principle, which lies at the heart of work with children and young people.



**Figure 2.1: The UNCRC Core Principles**

In summary, concepts of both children’s needs and children’s rights are highly significant in understanding residential childcare in Bangladesh. Both have been problematised and yet both continue to have a major influence on policy and practice. Although much of the current rhetoric forefronts children’s rights rather than their needs, children in majority world contexts like Bangladesh arguably have more needs than rights and this idea will inform my findings later.

## **2.4. Understandings of Attachment and Resilience**

Moving on from the concept of needs and rights, two theories have particular relevance for this research, that is, attachment and resilience.

### **Attachment**

Contemporary research on development confirms the importance of attachment (as first identified by Bowlby in 1951). Children benefit from having secure attachments early on in life and this benefit is carried on throughout their lives (Ladd 2005). Of all the influences on a child’s life (family, school, play, environment, community, and children themselves) the primary influence is that of the parent/guardian. It is argued that in order to develop successfully, children need to spend time with such significant adults (Aldgate and McIntosh 2006). Gibbons *et al.* (1995) state that the four main items which children want from parents are: time spent with them; reliability (keeping promises); predictability; and supervision (they value some form of checking). Similarly, Lindon (1996) notes that children want open communication with adults and want to know key information and feelings which affect their parents

and other significant adults. All such interactions are frequently understood in terms of attachment.

Several studies (Ainsworth *et al.* 1978; Bowlby 1951; Howe *et al.* 1999; Quinn 1995; Rutter 1985) have discussed attachment through a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. It is thus widely acknowledged that having the support of stable adults, particularly parental figures, with whom the child can develop a secure attachment, is essential for the child's physical survival, and their social and emotional development (Ainsworth *et al.* 1978; Bowlby 1951; Rutter 1985), as Fowler (1996: 25) quotes:

Children with secure attachments are ... likely to be more empathic, compliant, unconflicted and generally competent in their relationships with adults and peers. Children with insecure attachments tend to have trouble relating to other people because their behaviour is often either hostile and distant or overly dependent.... These tendencies may extend into adolescence and adulthood, influencing significant social relationships as well as basic attributes to life.

It has also been suggested that as children grow, they begin to develop an 'internal working model' in order to adapt their behaviour to those around them (Howe *et al.* 1999). This adaptation is based on the child's view of themselves and by others around them. Because of this, 'changing social environments and alterations in people's responsiveness can challenge and modify children's internal working models, leading to shifts in their pathways of development, for good or ill' (Howe *et al.* 1999:23). Research suggests that if a child goes through an unstable childhood, this can adversely affect their social and emotional behaviour in later life (Howe 2000). In a residential setting, children often experience repeated changes in staff, schools, teachers and social workers. Their experience of loss can be repeated again and again, leading them to devote their energy and attention to surviving in a continually changing environment. This can prevent such individuals from developing positive relationships with others and themselves (Howe 2000). It can increase their mistrust towards others, contributing towards a poor self-image and low self-esteem. Frequent changes in a child's residence may also undermine positive outcomes for children's future life-chances.

Bowlby (1951) argued that it is unlikely that an intimate bond will develop in the context of care unless a child is placed with carers before the age of two. However, it has been argued that this view paints a narrow and over-deterministic picture of attachment. Tizard (1977, 1986) argues that attachment can be developed at any age and not necessarily with the biological mother; rather, more important is having a significant adult. This is supported by Schofield *et al.* (2000) and Taylor (2006). The benefit of a secure attachment lies in the quality of relationship between child and adult. The relationship needs to provide a sense of identity and self-worth to the child who needs to know that s/he will receive support when encounter difficult situations. Although some details of attachment theory have been rightly criticised, I believe that it remains a powerful framework for conceptualising certain aspects of children's development. This point has also been made by Stein (2006:425), who states that attachment theory provides a framework for understanding young care leavers in terms of their pre-care experiences, care experiences and the impact of these experiences on life after care.

### **Resilience**

Some theorists have argued that adversity, rather than necessarily having negative consequences, may lead to the development of 'resilience' amongst children and young people. The concept of resilience has practical implications in young people's preparation for the future, since it directs attention to factors which enable children to overcome difficult circumstances. Resilience has been described as qualities that cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatever form it takes. Resilience may help a young person to cope, survive and thrive in the face of great hurt and disadvantage (Gilligan 1997; Rutter 1985; Smith 2009). Garmezy (1993:129) states that

The central element in the study of resilience lies in the power of recovery and in the ability to return once again to those patterns of adaptation and competence that characterised the individual prior to the pre-stress period .... 'To spring back' does not suggest that one is incapable of being wounded or injured. Metaphorically it is descriptively appropriate to consider that under adversity, a (resilient) individual can bend yet subsequently recover.

Self-esteem is seen as important because it serves as a vital buffer against stress (Rutter 1990). Involvement in play and in cultural and leisure activities helps to foster self-esteem and thus has valuable preventative functions (Borge 1996; Quinn 1995). Sinclair and Gibbs (1996:10) found that ‘young people in residential care who were involved in work, or were proud of something they did in their leisure time, were happier’ than their non-care counterparts. This consistent finding has drawn Gilligan (1999) to conclude that dance, art, caring for pets and involvement with community activities increases resilience and produces better psychological outcomes. Therefore, it can be argued that developing resilience might play a major role in preparing such children for a better future (Rutter 1993; Fowler 1996). However, resilience is related not only to individual attributes or environmental circumstances but also to the support network which the child is able to call upon, argue Borland *et al.* (1998). People who have had a secure attachment with a significant adult and a positive sense of identity are always likely to be more resilient. Supportive figures provide role models and important sources of practical help, encouragement, emotional support, advice and information (Cleaver 1997; Martin and Jackson 2002). Among adults, those with a limited support network are more likely to suffer from mental health problems (Brugha *et al.* 1993) and those who have higher self-esteem are more likely to get over the experience of victimisation more quickly (Dziech and Hawkins 1998).

Resilience theory also talks about children’s ‘power of recovery’, ‘ability to return once again’, ‘to spring back’ or ‘coping ability’. These are children’s natural ability to heal their wounds and bounce back for the future, with the help of others. In care institutions, children may develop resilience by which they are able to adjust to the ‘real world’ more easily and to challenge the traditional understanding and belief of ‘childhood’, ‘children’s needs’ and stigma attached to care (this will be developed later in the findings chapters). They may develop different skills and build up self-esteem as well as other personal qualities, which help them to be better prepared for the future. Children’s involvement in institutional activities and participation in decision-making processes of the daily management of the children’s home has been

found to be helpful; this involvement may act as a buffer to turn one's life around. Stein (2008:298) uses a resilience model to categorize care leavers as follows:

- Moving on: young people who are very resilient, have a positive identity, cope well with challenges of independence, have a job, are settled in the accommodation and are less dependent on leaving care services.
- Survivors: those who are just about coping, experience movements and instability, are in low-paid jobs or are unemployed, relationship problems, resilience being closely linked to the support received.
- Strugglers: the most disadvantaged, evidence a cluster of problems with support being essential to them.

The idea of resilience will be picked up later in my own research and in the findings chapters.

## **2.5. Understandings of Ecological Systems Theory**

The complementary theoretical approach underpinning this study is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which draws together insights from both ecological theory and systems approaches. This theory emphasises the interactive dynamics and relationships between person, process and context over time and so provides a useful framework for understanding and examining the complex interactions between the individual children in care and the various levels of the social systems. Bronfenbrenner (1992: 190) states that 'the characteristics of the person at a given time in his or her life are a joint function of the characteristics of the person and of the environment over the course of that person's life up to that time'. Through this theory, the development of a child into adulthood can only be fully understood in the context of the environments in which the child lives (Brooks-Gunn *et al.* 1993) because of the mutual influences from family, friends, neighbours, community and wider society have over time.

Within Bronfenbrenner's model, the child is seen as the central figure within five nested environmental systems (microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem and chronosystem) and all these have a mutual influence on the child.

- The microsystem is in the inner circle of the systems closest to the child where children directly participate in and influence interactions and develop

relationships with others in their immediate surroundings. This includes family, peers, school, neighbourhood, and childcare environments in which the child lives, interacts and develops. Relationships within the nested systems are said to have bi-directional influences, for example, a child's parents or staff in childcare institutions may affect his/her beliefs and behaviour and the child also affects the behaviour and beliefs of the parent/staff (Paquette and Ryan 2001).

- The mesosystem is the second circle of the system which provides connections and interconnections between the contexts of the child's microsystem (Berk 2008). For example, a child who experiences parental rejection may have difficulty with school; likewise certain peer influences may cause family turmoil.
- The exosystem is the third circle of the system in which the child does not actively participate or function, but the events and interactions in exosystems have direct influence and impact on their development (Berk 2008). For example, organisational monthly maintenance allowances for children in care, or a child's parents network of friends or their workplace. Although the child has no control over these influences, yet s/he will feel the force, both positive or negative, of such interactions on his own system.
- The macrosystem comprises the broader context of social and economic systems, law, ideology and custom and culture in which the child exists. The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other systems (Berk 2008).
- The chronosystem is the outer circle of the system which reflects the 'temporal changes in children's environment, which produce new conditions that affect development' (Berk 2000:30). External sources could be the times of a parent's death, while internal could be the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child. As children get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to determine how changes will affect them (Paquette and Ryan 2001).

Ecological systems theory is regarded as a valuable approach in identifying and understanding the complex interactions between the child and the various levels of the social systems on the child's development, in order to facilitate best responses (Aldgate 2006). The ecological model of a child's wellbeing has been widely used and is demonstrated in the Department of Health *et al.*'s (2000) framework for assessing children, as already discussed. Jack (2010) argues that this approach supports the safety, protection and well-being of children by acknowledging the shared responsibility of the individual, family and environment that is consistent with

a strengths perspective, seeing the whole community as a resource (see also Aldgate 2006).

Critics have argued that this theory does not offer an adequate account of the influences of social, biological and cognitive processes on a child's development and its causal process (Wakefield 1996; Rotabi 2008). However, others such as Aldgate (2006) have maintained that its value lies in the fact that it is a holistic model in understanding a child's development and transition. Berk (2008:29) describes the key elements of this approach as:

In ecological systems theory, development is neither controlled by the environmental circumstances, nor driven solely by inner dispositions. Rather children are both products and producers of their environment: the child and the environment form a network of interdependent effects.

Considering all these points, I believe that ecological systems theory helps to counteract the more narrow individualism inherent within theories of both children's needs and children's rights and is therefore useful for my own research.

## **2.6. Summary of Theoretical Concepts**

I have introduced a number of key ideas and theories in relation to childhood, children's needs and rights, attachment and resilience and ecological systems theory as a means of thinking about the experiences of young people leaving residential care institutions in Bangladesh. Each of these theoretical perspectives has contributed to my approach in undertaking this research study. Taking into consideration all of the debates and issues, I believe that children's preparation for leaving care is influenced by context and setting, by the children themselves and by wider society. Because of this, I will use ecological systems theory as a framework for understanding my own data, not least because this theory allows for the idea that children are active agents in and on their environment.

The following section will examine research evidence relating to the experiences of young people leaving care, from developed world (mainly British) perspectives, but also highlighting some majority world research where I have been able to locate this.

## **2.7. Care Leavers' Experiences: The Research Evidence**

Research on residential childcare and young people in the developed world has demonstrated that care leavers are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. They face numerous barriers in accessing education, employment and other developmental and transitional opportunities (Mendes and Moslehuddin 2004). Researchers such as Biehal *et al.* (1995) and Stein (2002) have documented the poor educational performance of young care leavers, their feelings of being stigmatised by the care process and their poor preparation for leaving care. It has been argued that being in care can weaken links with families, friends and neighbourhoods for some individuals. However, others (Ayoub Ali 1983; Emond 2004, 2009; Forrester 2008; Gaskell 2010; Harker *et al.* 2004) have stated that residential childcare is beneficial for young people and their achievement may be greater than has been suggested.

In this section, I focus on young care leavers' experiences, drawing on a review of British literature, since very little has been written on the Bangladeshi or South Asian context. However, I will incorporate findings concerning Bangladesh to the limited extent that literature supports it. My focus is on young people's education, employment, career opportunities, health and behaviour, identity, social networks and vulnerability towards criminal activities, such as prostitution. These aspects are all inter-connected and it will be important to consider their applicability for understanding young people's experiences of leaving care in Bangladesh.

### **2.7.1. Educational Attainment**

Poor educational attainment appears to be a common 'characteristic' of care leavers. Research in the UK over the last decade has shown that children in public care fall behind at school, do not achieve satisfactory qualifications and are less likely to go on to further education than their non-care counterparts (Martin and Jackson 2002). Wade (1997) found that educational attainment was poor for such young people; over half of his follow-up sample left school with no qualifications. In another study, Fletcher-Campbell (1997) found that almost one in three of those who left care between the ages of 16 and 18 left school with no qualifications, compared to less than one in ten of the general population. Dixon and Stein (2005) similarly found that

as many as 75% of young looked-after people from homes in five Scottish local authorities left school with few or no qualifications and as such were at a greater risk of being excluded from mainstream society.

Thus far, little research has been published regarding access to post-16 education for care leavers; Hayden *et al.* (1999) suggest that this may be because few take up this opportunity. A further factor may be the difficulty of locating such individuals after they leave care (Jackson and Sachdev 2001). What evidence there is suggests a bleak picture; only 12 per cent of children looked after by local authorities were in post-16 education, as compared to 68 per cent of that age group as a whole (Martin and Jackson 2002). Ajayi and Quigley (2006) found that although overall performance of participants was close to the national average at secondary school level, only one care leaver in their study went directly from school into higher education.

There appears to be no systematic research on the reasons for this poor educational attainment (Stein 2002). Studies were almost non-existent before 1987 in the UK (Jackson 2001), but some question whether the care process itself has served to exacerbate pre-care educational difficulties rather than compensate for them (Dixon and Stein 2002). Jackson (1987) undertook one of the first attempts to document the level of knowledge and understanding about education within the care system. More recently, Ajayi and Quigley (2006) noted that the weaknesses of young people's early educational experiences created long-term problems in reaching their educational potential. In addition, the low priority given to education by the majority of social workers, policy makers, practitioners, carers and researchers has been repeatedly highlighted in studies dating back to the 1970s (Jackson 1987) and most recently by Francis (2008).

In accounts from British care leavers, it has been noted consistently that teachers and social workers have low expectations of them (Sinclair 1997). It is often assumed that there is an association between being 'looked after' and having low expectations. Firth and Horrocks (1996:87-88) contrast the expectations of parents and of people working in the care system, with respect to young people:

Natural parents talk about further or higher education and career development and the family support necessary for this, while care system professionals talk about jobs, claiming benefits and independent living.

Other factors identified for poor attainment in the UK context include: damaging pre-care experiences, school truancy, emotional stress experienced prior to and during care, inadequate liaison between carers and schools, the outdated assumption that education is completed at age 16, the cultural background and training of staff (Aldgate *et al.* 1993; Cairns 2001; Parker *et al.* 1991; Raychuba 1987; Stein and Carey 1986; Williams *et al.* 2001). Moreover, children enter into care at different points in their childhood, for different reasons, and leave at different intervals (Forrester 2008; Walker-Gleaves and Walker 2008).

According to Berridge *et al.* (1997), UK residential children's homes have tended not to be educationally-enriching environments. They have lacked books, learning resources and quiet places for study. In Bangladesh, the low priority given to education can be explained by economic reasons, since the vast majority of the population are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Also, the government school system tends to be of poor quality and traditional classroom practices along with lack of accountability and supervision result in high drop-out rates (Khondokar 2002; Odhikar 2001). In rural areas, teachers may give proper lessons only once or twice a month (Odhikar 2001). During the rest of the time, older children are kept busy minding younger children and performing menial tasks, rather than being educated (Shamim 2001).

Hayden *et al.* (1999) noted three barriers from the care managers' points of view that directly contributed to poor post-16 education of looked-after children in the UK: underachievement in mainstream schooling, lack of entrance qualifications and young people's own lack of awareness of opportunities available to them. Others (Broad 1999; Orbell 2001) have mentioned financial constraints. In the Bangladeshi context, Ehsan (2001) has noted that children become economically active from the age of six. The costs associated with education, school fees and materials, prevent them from proceeding further.

### **2.7.2. Leaving Home, Leaving Care and Homelessness**

Research from the 1990s demonstrated that young care leavers in the UK were likely to live independently at a much earlier age than other UK young people (Biehal and Wade 1999; Stein 1997). The majority moved towards independent living before the age of 18, as compared to fewer than one in ten of their counterparts living with parents (Jones 1995). Biehal *et al.* (1992) found that nearly two-thirds of young people left care before they were 18, and a quarter by age 16. Wade (1997) found the same trend in his study; 29 per cent of young people left care at the age of 16 while 60 per cent had left by 18. By contrast, 87 per cent of the general population, in similar age brackets, had not left their parental home.

In Biehal *et al.*'s. (1995) survey, just under half of the cohort moved into lodgings or a friend's home when they first left care, while a fifth accessed independent tenancies in the voluntary or public sectors. The numbers accessing independent tenancies rose to around 60 per cent after 18-24 months. Porter (1984) found in his small study of seventeen care leavers that nine changed accommodation more than once within their first six months of leaving care, a possible indication of the beginnings of a tendency to drift from one form of insecure accommodation to another.

The reasons for moving are varied and depend on different pull and push factors. Some young people are attracted to the idea of independence and leave with the hope of improving their living conditions. The push factors affecting the moving-on process are: placement breakdown, problems with managing challenging behaviour and crises (e.g. experiencing intimidation from other residents, fleeing violence or eviction). Also traditional carers' assumptions and expectations of young people now being 'adult' and therefore that they should move on at the age of 16-17 years, regardless of maturity or preparedness (Biehal *et al.* 1995; Wade 2003). The option to stay on in residential care after the age of 18 is often not possible in Britain. The same could be said of the Bangladeshi context.

Many Bangladeshi government-registered orphanages receive scant funding. One orphanage did not receive any funding for one-and-a-half years; here most children had to flee in order to escape starvation. Those who remained were forced to grow

their own vegetables to alleviate their hunger (*The Daily Independent* 2007). Due to data constraints, exact figures are difficult to come by, but Odhikar (2001) has suggested that a good number of the 4.5 million street children in Bangladesh are care leavers.

In Bangladesh, one of the main reasons for young people choosing to leave care is to get a job so that they can support themselves and their birth families. Once out of the care institution, some have no option but to take up residence in slum areas where insecurity is part of life. Accessing accommodation is not easy for such a vulnerable group, and the situation in Bangladesh is dire mainly because of social stigma. The basic perception of private landlords is that such individuals are bad, spoiled or unreliable. Hence it is not surprising that although some may have positive experiences and go on to do well, others experience considerable difficulties, including a high risk of homelessness (Randall 1989).

### **2.7.3. Employment and Career Opportunities**

For living independently, reducing identity crises and developing social networks, employment plays a vital role in the lives of most people. On the importance of work, Burgess (1981:21) states:

How are young people at this stage of their lives expected to orientate their learning, widen their horizons and understanding, assess their worth in society, feel confident about their adulthood and commit their creative energies fully to the world around them, except through their occupational roles? It is work, after all, not leisure, which in present day society gives status to the individual, and direction, continuity and meaning to the lives of most people.

The available evidence informs us that poor schooling and low educational attainment affect many aspects of adult life. This is especially true for care leavers. Hence the need for employment has double significance for them: financial and practical (Porter 1984). Without employment, support from family and social networks can be lost. Gaps in the UK benefit system can make poverty and exclusion worse for care-leavers (Dixon and Stein 2002).

Evidence of unemployment among care leavers is well documented. Analysis of the National Child Development Study (NCDS) data revealed that young people leaving care were much more likely to be unemployed or to be in unskilled or semi-skilled work (Cheung and Heath 1994). *Moving On* found that half of their young people remained unemployed after months of leaving care. Nearly two-thirds of them failed to establish stable career patterns, facing periods of short-term casual work interspersed with episodes of training and unemployment (Biehal *et al.* 1995).

Bangladesh has no social welfare system comparable to the UK, so finding work, often in the informal sector, is essential for survival. Employment rates are generally high. However, in absolute terms, approximately 2.6 million young people remain under-employed, with figures increasing daily (Muhith 2012). Those who are educationally weak, emotionally immature, abused or unskilled may find it difficult to access employment. Hence, they will often undertake unskilled and sometimes hazardous work in order to earn a living (Odhikar 2001). In one Bangladeshi study, young people were found to be engaged in more than three hundred different types of activities, forty-seven of which were deemed hazardous (Khair 2001), or exposing them to violence and abuse, such as adolescent girls being forced into prostitution, putting them at serious risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, of unwanted pregnancies, and of being physically abused, socially rejected and psychologically traumatized (MOWCA 1997). This is important because young people in Bangladesh tend not to leave care because of their age but rather because of need, unless they are from a government orphanage where they must leave by the age of 18 (DSW 2002).

#### **2.7.4. Health and Behaviour**

Research in the UK has identified greater health risks and behavioural and emotional disturbances amongst looked-after children compared to other children. Monaghan and Broad (2003) found in their study that just under half (41%) of young people aged between 16 and 25 believed that being in care had damaged them mentally, physically or 'in every way'. When asked about their health, 68 per cent told researchers that it was 'good' or 'OK', with the remaining saying 'not good' or 'poor'. In contrast, when asked if they felt 'healthy', 51 per cent said they did not.

One study revealed that looked-after children were four times more likely to develop psychiatric disorders and five times more likely to have a major depressive illness than others (McCann *et al.* 1996). Similarly, Save the Children (1995) and Saunders and Broad (1997) found that 48 per cent of care leavers suffered from long-term mental illness. Packman and Hall (1996) and Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) add to the growing evidence that significant numbers of looked-after children now manifest difficult-to-manage or distressed behaviour. Furthermore, depression, loneliness, anger, frustration and attempted suicide were identified as common in Hayden (1997) and Monaghan and Broad's (2003) studies. It was found that care leavers tended to employ harmful ways to cope with stress, including smoking, drinking alcohol and using illicit drugs. Most young drug-users claim drugs have a positive effect on their health; similarly in Bangladesh, young drug-users frequently say that drugs help them to cope (own experience).

Research focusing on the physical and emotional health of looked-after children has been fairly minimal until recently. Factors that are known to increase the risk of severe emotional and behavioural difficulties are: unmet needs, chronic family illness, difficulties in family relationships, neglect and abuse, unpredictability and disruption and frequent movements (Bamford and Wolkind 1998; Cleaver 1997; Frost *et al.* 1999; Kahan 1999; Mather *et al.* 1997). Monaghan and Broad (2003) found that 73 per cent felt that 'negative family relationships' made them 'feel ill'. All young people mentioned stress as the biggest factor affecting their emotional wellbeing, with 36 per cent citing lack of money as the main cause, 22 per cent blaming family relationships and 15 per cent citing their partner's behaviour.

Professional bureaucracy is also a factor affecting care leavers' state of mental health. Mather *et al.* (1997) and Wade *et al.* (1998) argue that the focus on statutory medical examinations in the UK was unhelpful and appeared to be undertaken more for the benefit of social and medical services than to address the health needs of children. Although professionals emphasise physical examination, advice on risky behaviour and reporting to social services, teenagers wanted to avoid physical

examinations and wished for confidential advice on skills, health care, eating disorders, stress and self-esteem.

In Bangladesh, few policy and decision makers seem concerned about the mental and emotional health of young people. Though still hidden issues, the trauma of separation and the stigma that results from admission into residential care are important factors and their severity depends upon the child's age and developmental stage, the quality of relationships with peers and teachers, the duration of separation itself, the environment into which the separated child is placed and also the cultural context in which the child grows up (Falhberg 1994; Tolfree 1995). Brandon *et al.* (1998:148) mention that the experience of loss that follows separation has 'emotional, cognitive and behavioural characteristics' similar to bereavement.

Children who become separated from their significant relations on entry into residential care potentially lose part of their community network. As a result, the maintenance of emotional bonds is disrupted (Papouli 2002). Young people require age-appropriate information for their emotional and mental wellbeing. For example, issues relating to sexuality are particularly sensitive in Bangladesh. There is a danger that young people in the care system are more disadvantaged in relation to receiving advice and information on sexuality than others. When children have been hurt psychologically or physically, they may react in anti-social or self-harming ways, which can have long-term consequences on their lives (Cleaver 1997). Lack of care, knowledge about availability and location of services, access to emergency services, cost of medical treatment and official corruption are all causative factors for ill health, emotional and behavioural problems in Bangladesh (MOWCA 1997).

The consistent message of this discussion is that young people living in or leaving care suffer severely in health, emotional and behavioural problems. As such, they may be labelled 'problem teenagers' and often do not receive the help that they truly require.

### **2.7.5. Identity and Social Networks**

Research has highlighted the impact of care and care-leaving on identity. It is demonstrated that care leavers are particularly at risk of identity crises. Frost *et al.* (1999) found that young people in the UK who changed residence several times and were separated from their families for many years had weakened family relationships and were confused about their birth identity. Similarly, many young people were confused about their cultural identity, affecting their levels of confidence and self-esteem (First Key 1987; Hall 1992; Tizard and Phoenix 1993).

Biehal *et al.* (1995) argue that the quality of social networks and the ability to make and sustain relationships are often interrelated. Gilligan (2001, 2012) stresses the concept of 'strong social networks' for promoting favourable outcomes for identity formation for those people who experience life in care. Many of those who have succeeded in the face of adversity appear to have experienced a secure base, whilst those who have succumbed to hardship appear to have lacked this factor (Bocking 2002). In *Moving On*, young people with a secure sense of identity were found to have good social networks, relationship skills and positive family links, whereas those with an insecure sense of identity had not (Biehal *et al.* 1995).

Birth identity is a common issue amongst young people in residential institutions in Bangladesh. Children from government institutions face discrimination as a result of being orphans or poor; sex-workers' children from NGO institutions face even more stigma and discrimination because of their birth identity, considered to be the most 'tainted' or 'rotten' by society (Uddin *et al.* 2001). Knowing the identity of the biological father is crucial in Bangladesh to avoid the shame of 'non-identity'. Thus there is the widespread practice in brothel communities of providing children with the names of fictitious fathers, who may be their mother's 'regular' client. Unfortunately, this man is not necessarily a permanent feature in their lives. This causes an identity crisis, since children do not know to whom they belong. Boys find this hard, alongside the lack of future prospects for them. They may become involved in anti-social activities such as thieving, pimping, running illicit drinking bars and gambling dens, or becoming extortionists (BSAF and AB 2001). Girls fare no better;

it is virtually impossible to arrange respectable marriages for girls outside of the brothel and many follow their mothers into a life of prostitution (own experience).

### **2.7.6. Vulnerability towards Criminal Activities**

Research evidence shows that care leavers often face an accelerated transition into independence (Vernon 2000). They are forced to tackle the multiple challenges of managing tenancies, finding and remaining in employment, coping financially and building and sustaining support networks, all within a very short space of time. These challenges are set against the backdrop of care leavers being a marginalised group. There is also some evidence that young looked-after people are over-represented in the prison population of the UK (Prison Reform Trust 1991), and indeed some young people enter care because of offending. Centrepoin in the UK estimates that within six weeks, most young people living on the streets will resort to criminal activity as a survival strategy (Ayre and Barrett 2000). In their survey of homeless youth, McCarthy and Hagan (1992) found that 30 per cent of participants had worked as prostitutes since leaving care. Pitts (1997) and Bluett *et al.* (2000) argue that for the most part, prostitution is a strategy for survival, adopted by vulnerable, alienated and desperate people who see themselves as having little value and nothing left to lose. They feel that they have virtually no alternative. In fact, the experience of living in care itself is said to put young people at risk of entering into prostitution due to social stigma, marginalization, otherness and a desire for money, especially when linked to feeding drug habits (Kirby 1995).

### **2.8. Conclusion**

This chapter has examined a range of theoretical concepts pertinent to the research, as well as a broader context of research evidence in relation to the experiences of children and young people who leave care. It has been argued that there is no single theory that best explains the experiences of care-leavers, either in the UK or in the field context of Bangladesh. Instead, a holistic, ecological systems approach is proposed, drawing within it ideas of children's needs, children's rights, attachment and resilience. It is also argued that analysis should be underpinned by a critical examination of the ideas of child and childhood, in order to make sense of the experiences of children in a majority world setting. Evidence from research has

highlighted the importance of education, employment, health and behaviour, identity and social networks and vulnerability towards criminal activities. These themes will be explored in the findings chapters, alongside relationships and after-care support. The next chapter concentrates on children, childhood and Bangladeshi residential childcare in order to set the scene for the study.

# Children, Childhood and Residential Care: the Bangladeshi Context

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a wider review of institutional residential childcare histories, policies and practices in Bangladesh. Understanding the historical background is vital to understanding the social, political and ideological roots of residential childcare institutions of Bangladesh, and thus setting the context for Bangladeshi children and young people who have left care. The chapter begins with a general overview of the country, its welfare system, family structures, cultures and social changes. This is followed by a discussion of children and childhood, as well as child welfare and child protection policies. The final section looks at the history of residential childcare institutions and why children find themselves living there. In writing this chapter, I draw on three main sources of evidence: findings from research; ‘grey’ literature produced by NGOs; and my own personal experience from having worked in child welfare for 16 years.

### 3.2. General Overview

Bangladesh, formerly known as East Pakistan, is a young country, born on 16<sup>th</sup> of December, 1971, when the two parts of Pakistan divided, after a bitter conflict. As Bangladesh is part of the Indian sub-continent, its culture and religious practices are highly connected with India and Pakistan. Hartmann and Boyce (1979:8) described Bangladesh in 1974 as:

a lush, green and fertile land. From the windows of buses and decks of ferryboats, we looked over a landscape of natural abundance; everywhere shaped the hands of men. Rice paddies carpeted the earth, and gigantic squash vines climbed over the roofs of the bamboo village houses. The rich soil, plentiful water and hot, humid climate made us feel as if we had entered a natural greenhouse.....Bangladesh is rich enough in fertile land, water and natural gas for fertilizer not only to be self-sufficient in food, but food exporter, even with its rapidly increasing population size.

Of course, this has changed over the intervening years as the population level has increased and as natural disasters have taken their toll.

Bangladesh is located on the northern edge of the Bay of Bengal, bordered on three sides by India. It also shares a border with Myanmar (See Map 2.1) in the southeast. 152.5 million people inhabit Bangladesh (BBS 2011<sup>1</sup>), 45 per cent of them children under the age of 18. It exceeds the UK population by nearly 100 million. Bangladesh has a land area of 55,598 square miles, slightly larger in size than that of England and Wales combined.



**Map 2.1: Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is predominately an agricultural economy. The subtropical climate means that crops can be grown all the year round. Over 80 per cent of the population live in rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> the final result of the 5th Population and Housing Census 2011, *The Daily Star*, Monday, July 16, 2012

The national literacy rate is 55.9 per cent, however 78.63 per cent of literates are aged between 15-24 years. The highest rates are those aged between 15-19 years who average 82.17 per cent of the literate population. In line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets, primary education is compulsory for all children, with additional emphasis being placed on girls' education (BBS 2011).

The main religion practised is Islam (89.7%). The majority of Muslims are Sunni, consisting of nearly 95 per cent of this population. The remaining are Shi'a and other sects. Around 9.2 per cent are Hindu, 0.7 per cent Buddhist, 0.3 per cent Christian and 0.1 per cent others (such as Animalist and atheist). All have equal rights and freedom to practise their own beliefs.

### **Poverty, Population Pressure, Economy and Children**

Bangladesh is possibly the richest country in the world as far as inland fishery resources are concerned. However, its soil may be rich but its people are poor. Poverty prevails across the country (Hartmann and Boyce 1979). The average per capita income is only \$868 US dollar (Muhith 2012) even though per capita GDP has more than doubled since 1975. About 49.8 per cent of the population lives below poverty line, 36 per cent survive on less than \$1 a day, while 82.8 per cent live on incomes of less than \$2 a day (UNDP 2011; World Bank 2011).

Bangladesh's population growth rate was among the highest in the world during the 1960s and 1970s, when the country swelled from 50 to 90 million. With the promotion of birth control in the late 1970's, the growth rate has slowed significantly. Life expectancy has risen from 50 to 68.9 years (UNDP 2011). The fertility rate per woman now stands at 4.3. Although the population growth rate has reduced from 2.48 per cent in 1994 to 1.37 per cent today (BBS 2011), Bangladesh is the seventh most populous nation in the world. In addition, the influx of Myanmar's Rohingya refugees has put additional pressure on the country. There are an estimated 300,000-500,000 refugees in Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, BBC Bangla, June 12, 2012.

The quality of public health care service is poor with only three physicians per 10,000 of the population and doctors spend only 58 seconds per patient during each visit (Global Health 2012). Government hospitals are overcrowded, with long waiting times and care that is rushed and impersonal. In addition, insufficient supplies of medication, staff shortages, and poor management and coordination skills exacerbate the problems of public health care. The vast majority of qualified health care providers are located in urban areas (UNICEF 2009b). Due to price rises of the basic necessities over recent years, including that of basic food items, many families, even in the middle income band, struggle to maintain a good quality of life. Coping strategies of the poor include reducing food intake and health expenditure, withdrawing children from school, and taking on debt, all of which are likely to have lasting impacts of quality of life (UNICEF 2009a). About 21 million people are deprived of safe drinking water and only 39 per cent of households have access to latrines with functioning water seals or a similar or better level of hygiene.

Bangladesh's economy is heavily reliant on remittances from its expatriate communities. These remittances contribute to the country's gross domestic product, keeping its rural economy vibrant and refuelling bank reserves. However, due to ongoing political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, a number of migrant workers have had to return home over recent years. The number of outgoing workers has also dropped, as some countries have stopped fresh recruitments due to the chronic global economic recession. As a result, inward remittances have fallen by 2.43 per cent to \$1.08 billion in March 2012 compared to the previous month (*The Daily Star*, June 12, 2012). This has put a significant strain on the country's economy, which seems likely to worsen if this situation continues.

The current number of literate unemployed people above the age of 15 years is 2.6 million (Muhith 2012), however this number is much higher if child labourers are counted. In fact, unemployment has increased by 1.6 per cent over the last decade. If this trend continues, it is estimated that figures will rise to 6 million in 2015, when most will be literate (*The Daily Samokal* 2011).

While cities have developed very rapidly over the last three decades, much development has been largely unplanned. It is estimated that nearly 1 per cent of the rural population migrates to urban areas each year. Most migrants are poor, landless labourers, in search of work. Some migrate temporarily, during lean seasons, while others migrate permanently. With one of the fastest urbanisation rates in Asia, the disparity between the urban rich and poor is growing: it is now estimated that seven million people live in urban slums, 3.3 million of them being children (UNICEF 2008). The provision of drinking water and sanitation is inadequate in most areas, and more so in the slums. Unsafe and unregulated shelters, unsanitary environments, garbage, poor roads and canalizations, undisciplined and dangerous traffic are common features in the cities (UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO 2008). UNICEF argues that the policy agenda has largely neglected the burgeoning urban slums and urban poor (UNICEF 2010a).

Political turbulence is another major phenomenon in the country. Democracy has never been fully achieved (Quddusi 2008). At the time of my fieldwork, a military-backed, caretaker government was in power. Due to political instability, Bangladesh has suffered from a range of problems: endemic corruption, political criminalization, lack of transparency and accountability of all sectors including the judiciary system, obstructing the country's growth, development and public welfare (UNICEF 2009b; World Bank 2011).

Along with 'man-made' problems, Bangladesh has experienced repeated natural calamities. As a low-lying river delta in the tropics, the country has always been disaster-prone, experiencing regular monsoon floods, cyclones, storms, tidal surges, riverbank erosions and droughts. These disasters increase poverty levels as well as the hardships and miseries of all people affected. Bangladesh is also the second most vulnerable country to climate change, with an estimated 30 million people likely to be affected in the next 30 to 50 years (Vidal 2012). UNICEF asserts that the government has developed substantial capacity in disaster management and risk reduction, but the country's location, low elevation, poverty, population density, poor infrastructure, and high dependence on natural resources make it exceptionally vulnerable (UNICEF 2009b).

Bangladesh is a young country. Sixty-six million children under 18 years constitute 45 per cent of the total population of the country, while 42.4 million children aged 5-17 comprise about one-third of the country's total population (BBS 2011). Evidence suggests that Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing maternal mortality and infant mortality rates, as well as increasing life expectancy in comparison to other South Asian countries. The under-5 infant mortality rate has been reduced; likewise, the maternal mortality rate has also gone down. Government has achieved success in increasing awareness of the benefits of breast feeding (Muhith 2012). However, the prevalence of malnutrition among children is found to be a challenge to the other successes of the government. Currently, 36 per cent of infants are said to be under-weight and nearly half suffer from chronic malnutrition (Muhith 2012; UNICEF 2009b).

Similarly, Bangladesh has achieved significantly positive outcomes for primary school enrolment rates over the past two decades, with 92 per cent enrolment in 2011 (World Bank 2011) but the issues of attendance, quality of education and drop-out remain a concern. Primary schooling is free by law; however educational materials, school uniforms and other related costs are still borne by parents, and have increased in recent years. The government gives a stipend for girl students, but this is lower than the amount required for primary education of a child (CAMPE 2007).

In addition, during natural disasters, many children become homeless along with their family. Displacement of millions of people as well as death is commonplace. Children may lose their parents and relatives, making them vulnerable and increasing their chances of abuse, neglect and exploitation. In Bangladesh, orphans, children living on the streets, working children, children in conflict with the law, and victims of trafficking, violence, abuse and exploitation are considered the most vulnerable. UNICEF (2009c) argues that of an estimated 400,000 street children in Bangladesh, nearly 10 per cent have been forced into prostitution for survival. Around 10.1 per cent of the total labour force comprises child labour (that is, children below 15 years). Of these child labourers, 1.3 million are said to be engaged in hazardous work. Inevitably, children of poor families face the worst hardships (ILO 2011;

UNICEF 2009c). In terms of deprivation of material goods and services, research suggests that 41 per cent of the country's children are deprived of shelter, 64 per cent of sanitation, 59.4 per cent of information, 57 per cent of nutrition, 16 per cent of health, and 8 per cent of education (Barakat *et al.* 2010).

Bangladesh is moving towards becoming a middle-income country; it has achieved a sustained economic growth with its overall poverty situation being halved since independence. UNICEF (2011) records substantial improvements on the social front, despite all its challenges. However, Bangladesh still features at the lower end of the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking 146 out of 187 countries, being placed below the South Asian regional average (UNDP 2011).

### **3.3. Welfare and Social Policy**

Traditionally, family ties and social bonds are strong in Bangladesh, while the social welfare system is weak and very different from that found in Western democracies or other developed countries (Aziz 1979). However, the Bangladeshi government has a constitutional obligation to look after its people living in poverty. With that obligation, Bangladesh has formulated some policies and allocated resources to pursue a number of Safety Net Programmes (SNPs). These programmes are mostly designed for the poor, marginalized and socially disadvantaged groups in order to enhance their strengths and capacity. Broadly, the programmes include: social security and protection, healthcare and nutrition, safe motherhood, employment, training and empowerment. Current government claims are that the incidence of poverty and disparity has been reduced, and that wage levels have increased as a consequence of its social security and social empowerment interventions. 25.3 per cent of families are covered by these social safety net programmes. Poverty levels have reduced from 41.0 per cent to 31.5 per cent (Muhith 2012).

While there are benefits in having these programmes, Barakat *et al.* (2010) found that government social protection programmes operated differentially, covering between 5 per cent and 58 per cent of the affected population in different areas; moreover, existing major social protection programmes covered less than 25 per cent of their eligible beneficiaries. As a result, many people have slipped through the safety net.

They also criticised the poor allocation of resources against the needs, the lack of experienced staff to provide a quality service, and more importantly, corruption. They found that many people needed to bribe staff so that they would be included in the projects and to get allowances and support that was their entitlement; corruption was said to be one of the major culprits in destroying the success of such programmes.

Because formal social safety nets are weak, individuals rely on their families for their most reliable safety net. The relationships between extended families and neighbours are very strong and interdependent in nature (Aziz 1979). Bangladeshi culture does not encourage living in a nuclear family; it is not practical for survival. Religion stipulates that parents look after their children, prepare them for adult life and children in their turn, look after their parents during old age. Elderly care homes, such as those found in the developed world, are frowned upon. Parents and extended family members support newly-weds financially, emotionally and in other ways, even during times of financial scarcity. It is commonplace for parents and older people to be treated with respect, with younger members of the family listening to and benefiting from their wisdom (Aziz 1979; own experience).

It is becoming more common for people to seek and get support from NGOs. NGO support covers almost all aspect of development and skills: empowerment, women's participation in economic activities, education, healthcare, micro-credit and raising awareness on rights and legal supports to name a few. Micro-credit is seen as a vehicle for poverty alleviation, social development and empowerment. It has been argued that micro-credit programmes have increased employment and income, especially for women. It has provided an escape-route from poverty for millions of people, having a positive impact on expenditure on children's welfare, including girls' education (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004; Mahmud 2007, 2008). However, there are also debates about whether NGOs actually contribute to socio-economic development, particularly with regard to micro-credit programmes (Hossain and Knight 2008; Rosario 2006). Furthermore NGOs have been working in child welfare, child rights and related issues by providing services and awareness-raising. There

have been some successes in this regard. However, NGOs cannot provide blanket support and the support which they do provide is often temporary. NGOs have certain constraints including dependency on funding and are openly accused of being donor driven. There are also complaints against INGOs that they are expensive and reluctant to use home-grown, low cost technologies and solutions, even those proved to be successful. However, they undoubtedly have made some contributions to growth in the economy, women's empowerment, enhancement of human rights, delivery of health and education, advocacy and social mobilization.

### **3.4. Children and Childhoods in Bangladesh**

There is no uniform definition of a 'child' in Bangladeshi laws and policies. As a signatory of the UNCRC, Bangladesh agrees that every Bangladeshi person under the age of 18 years old is a child, but there is considerable variation within this between 9 and 18 years. According to the Constitution of Bangladesh and the Children Act 1974, anyone aged below 16 years is a child, while in national child policy it is age 14. The Employment of Children Act 1938 stated 12 years for children in regular jobs; while the Factories Act 1965 prohibited the employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 fixed 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls for marriage, while under Muslim law, a child is somebody who has not reached puberty, which generally occurs at the age of 12 years for girls and 15/16 years for boys (Siddiqui 2001:10). Christian Law in Bangladesh, on the other hand, reckons under 16 years for males and under 13 years for females, as a child. According to Penal Code section 28, the age of criminal responsibility is 9 years of age. On the contrary, the Children Act 1974 defines 'child' and 'youth offender' as persons under the age of 16. This is inconsistent with the UNCRC, which Bangladesh ratified, which defines 'child' as anyone under the age of 18.

Blanchet (1996) argues that many children and parents in Bangladesh do not measure children's age in years, but according to their level of 'understanding'. Because of this, many children have difficulty proving their age and therefore accessing age-related protection because birth registration rates remain low in Bangladesh. These variations of laws and regulations demonstrate that there is no single and uniform

definition of a child and childhood. Undoubtedly this inconsistency applies across different countries both in the minority and majority world countries (Cree 2010). The official definition of childhood in Bangladesh is mainly confined to the state administration. The experiences and expectation of childhood vary widely between and within economic condition, social class, educational level, religious faith of societal members, as well as who is doing the defining and interpreting.

There is no simple word or phrase in Bangla to describe the concept of 'childhood' or a life stage of transition from a child to an adult. 'Shishu' is the word most commonly used to describe 'child', but it generally means 'a small child or infant'. In fact, the word Shishu does not refer only to the age or physical development of a child, it also refers to his/her life circumstances and level of innocence (Blanchet 1996) and social position. For example, middle and upper class children tend to maintain their 'innocence' and hence remain in the childhood phase of life longer than children from lower and marginalised classes. Having to fend for oneself, being forced into work at a young age or getting to know too much about 'life', quickens one's entry into adulthood. Hence 'childhood' is different for different categories of 'child'; an orphan child, for example, is expected to develop rapidly into a state of 'understanding', if he/she is poor. Similarly children placed into domestic servitude, and a pre-pubertal girl given into marriage, are similarly forced into adulthood (Blanchet 1996:38-48).

Blanchet (1996) argues that working children lose their innocence and their childhood disappears when they start working in the 'adult world', sharing Postman's (1982) view of disappearing childhood. She also claims that children get 'spoiled' in the eyes of society through their early entry into this adult world of work. Society no longer considers them 'children'. Blanchet gives examples of children working in the bidi factory and the sex industry. The daughter of a sex worker who has been initiated into the sex industry is no longer considered to be a child, but a woman. She reports that due to their occupations and working conditions they are considered 'spoilt' and so no longer children. These categories of 'child' tend to come from the 'poorer' segments of society. Middle-class parents will not generally

expect their child to work for a living, although they may decide to marry their daughters off before they reach the age of 18.

Bangladeshi society does not generally allow children a separate existence. There is no differentiation between the lives of adults and children, they occupy the same social spaces and generally participate in many cooperative activities. However, codes for action for each member of the family, and for society at large, are determined by religion, culture, norms and values (Blanchet 1996:26-41). Consequently, the boundaries of Bangladeshi childhood vary according to children's life experiences, the autonomy and authority that they gain, their physical development and society's convenience (Bissell 2003). Factors such as the individual's gender, rank, family occupation and status in a God-ordained world, social class and regional location also play a part.

In Bangladesh, adult-child relationships are highly characterized by authority, obedience, respect and dependency. Usually the father is the bread-winner and decision-maker for the family. Thus he has the authority to make decisions on behalf of his children. Children accept his decision as best for them and follow the advice of their elders out of respect for seniority (Blanchet 1996; White 2002). The religious and cultural belief that elders know better because they have greater life experience as well as trust that parents and elders would not make any decision which is not good for children is deeply held (Blanchet 1996; Rosario 2002). This is not to say that agency and resistance is absent, rather it is less openly expressed and visible than amongst 'Westernised' societies. Deviance manifests itself in different forms, and certainly in dimensions of children's autonomous activities<sup>3</sup>. These Bangladeshi experiences are similar to other parts of the majority world, such as Ghana (Twum-Danso 2010), Nigeria (Okoli 2009), India (Balagopalan 2011; Pattnaik 1996; Sen 2005), Nepal (Onta-Bhatta 2001) and even some developed countries (as discussed earlier). However, authority and control is not merely related to the child as an individual, but rather in relation to others. The child is perceived as part of the

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Maggie Morrison who carried out her PhD fieldwork in one rural part of Bangladesh with children and families.

greater family unit, rather than as an independent entity. His or her behaviour could have serious consequences not only for him/herself but also for his/her kin if s/he deviates from the accepted norms of behaviour. Likewise one's positive actions and behaviour may enhance the status and prestige of the wider kin group. Children are trained to follow certain norms, values, codes and activities decided by society based on religious belief, cultural values, family background and social status. The application of this training is highly influenced by time, situation, persons and context.

Childhood in rural Bangladesh is very much based around peer activity. Young children predominantly engage in spending time with child siblings and wider child-kin, as well as neighbours. By the time the rural child is weaned and walking, even often before fully mobile and physically independent, they are spending increasing amounts of time in the company of older peers, other children from their own family or kinship group, who may or may not live in the same compound. Thus it is not uncommon within village society to see a young child of three or four years out unattended by an adult, carrying a baby or younger sibling, and it is normal to see older children quite adeptly supervising their younger siblings. The very young child is thus introduced to the local 'culture' of childhood, by an already 'initiated child', freeing mothers and older girls to carry on with their daily domestic tasks (own experience). Indeed, Blanchet (1996) states that by the time a Bangladeshi child is weaned, around eighteen months to two years of age, s/he is probably spending only two to three hours a week in intensive interaction with the mother and generally is cared for by older siblings. The majority of the child's life is surrounded by the company of other children, which makes sense in a society where children are numerous and every pair of hands is useful for the task of ensuring survival (Aziz and Maloney 1985; Blanchet 1996; Kabeer 2001). It is noted that children's interactions with other children consists of time to play as well as engaging in 'work' or household chores set by elder family members.

The life experiences of the middle-class child are, of course, very different from the working-class child. A minority of children, mainly from elite classes, grow up in

luxury like little princes and princesses, surrounded by servants from the poorer segments of society. These servants are often ordered about by these children. The elite children are nourished by the sharp social differences of Bangladesh and other majority countries of South Asia (Nestvogel 2005), although it is not uncommon for them to be taken care of by child domestics, who are either of a similar age or even younger. Child domestics will be expected to start work early in the morning before the family members get up, and to finish chores and make breakfast for each family member. They often sleep on kitchen or living room floors, eat leftover food, are not allowed to sit at the dining table or on the sofa, have poor quality clothing, and do not have access to toiletries or formal schooling. Interestingly, both sets of children at times may become emotionally attached to each other because they spend a lot of time together, especially if they are young (Shamim *et al.* 1995; own experience).

Orphan children from poor families tend to be looked after by their extended family. If this is not possible they will be sent to orphanages, or girls will be sent to work as domestic servants and boys sent to work in garages or restaurants (own experience).

Educated and socially-conscious parents place heavy emphasis on their children's education, thus shaping their experiences of childhood. Children spend more and more time in study, attending numerous private tutorials or coaching sessions in order to get good grades in examinations to access good jobs. In the major cities, schooling may interfere with other activities such as play, attending family functions and visiting village homes. This is dependent on the children's parental situation, their socio-economic conditions and other such factors. Children living in slums, working on the street or as domestic servants get few opportunities to study. The only opportunity they may have is attending an NGO-run informal education centre for an hour or so, learning basic education, so that they can read, write and count (own experience).

The differences for children coming from so-called 'good society' and brothel society are also stark. Generally in Bangladeshi households, resources are lavished on sons rather than on daughters, but in brothel society, it is lavished on daughters,

since they will be the main breadwinner. Brothel girls are given extra food (and sometimes harmful drugs) to make them healthy and attractive (own experience). For brothel children (both boys and girls), education can be a route out of their predicament if good employment opportunities can be offered. They may attend school hiding their birth identity and manage to complete a few classes at primary school level, but after leaving school there is often no clear path for them to follow. The lack of opportunities for boys often leaves them disorientated and more likely to become drawn into antisocial and life-risking activities including drug use; girls, meanwhile, follow their mothers and become sex workers (Uddin *et al.* 2001; own experience).

Brothel children are shunned by mainstream society and so do not get opportunities to mix with other groups of children. They carry a sense of shame regarding their origin, whether as a result of their direct involvement in the world of prostitution or merely by association. They suffer greatly from social stigma and discrimination. Sex worker mothers, due to the nature of their work, have little time to devote to their children. Thus children spend great amounts of their time with their peers and siblings, forming powerful bonds (for good and ill), as they become drawn into the behaviour of others (Uddin *et al.* 2001).

In brothel households, the decision-making power is with the mother. The routine exposure to commercial sex and other illicit activities leads to the development of an unorthodox morality. Mothers' and children's health is seriously compromised by the risk of contracting sexually-transmitted infections and widespread use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Children in brothel communities are likely to become sexually active much earlier than other children because of the constant observation of sexual acts in the environment. In 'good Bangladeshi society', in contrast, sex before marriage is totally unacceptable for children and adults.

### **3.5. Child Welfare, Protection and Policy**

Child welfare in Bangladesh is greatly influenced by the cultural tradition and religious beliefs of the country as well as government legislation and the impact of NGOs' policy and practice.

### **Cultural Tradition and Religious Beliefs**

As discussed earlier, parents have the main responsibility for providing material, emotional, social and economic support necessary for their child's growth and development, welfare and protection. Parents tend to do whatever they can to secure a positive future for their child by providing quality education, care and support. Moreover, traditional Bangladesh has a strong culture of caring for orphans, the sick and needy, and the elderly within the extended family unit, as well as by the community and religious establishments. Based on cultural and religious beliefs, provision of care to orphans, and to abandoned, and vulnerable children has been seen as the duty of the extended family and community. Islam teaches that all children have the right to be fed, clothed and protected until they reach adulthood, and to receive love, affection and education from their parents, and to be treated equally to their siblings. The responsibility for orphans is primarily that of the caregiver. Islam teaches that direct guardians must also protect orphans' identities, by allowing them to keep their birth parents' names. This preserves their heritage and establishes their connection with other living family members. However orphans are the responsibility of the entire community and everyone ensures that their welfare needs are met since the Qur'an clearly sets a tone for the treatment of orphans: 'Treat not the orphan with harshness' (Qur'an 93:9). Moreover the Prophet Muhammad (SW) said those who assist orphans and are kind to them are promised the companionship of the Prophet Muhammad in the afterlife (Paradise). This is a very strong message for Muslims to care and protect this vulnerable group of children and the reason why orphanages are so widely supported (as noted, nearly 90% of the population is Muslim).

### **Government Legislation**

The Bangladeshi government has made a number of commitments at international, regional and national levels to uphold the rights of the child by creating an environment of opportunity for children.

As a signatory to the UNCRC, Bangladesh was obliged to take steps with maximum extent, to reinforce and ensure the rights of the child to survival, development, protection and participation. The convention states that the national government shall ensure children's right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28) and social

security (Article 26) without discrimination (Article 2) for the best interest of the children (Article 3). Bangladesh is signatory to 'A World Fit for Children' declarations and has ratified the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention'. Along with this, it has also made commitments at the World Conference on Education for All, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, World Conference on Human Rights, International Conference on Population and Development, Conference on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Declaration), World Summit for Social Development, and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

At a regional level, Bangladesh has signed or endorsed a number of declarations and conventions. Among those are the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution 2002; SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia; Rawalpindi Declaration for the eradication of child labour by 2010; Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002); SAARC Social Charter; Colombo Statement on Children of South Asia 2009; Colombo Declaration 2011. The purpose of these endorsements are to promote the rights and wellbeing of children by reducing malnutrition, enhancing access to health and education services and ensuring child protection through strengthening regional cooperation and funding.

The Bangladeshi Constitution safeguards the rights and interests of children through the provision of meeting basic needs including food, clothing, education, shelter and medical care. Article 28 (4) of the Constitution empowers the State to make special provisions for underprivileged and disadvantaged children and women. Articles 27, 28 and 31 lay down the general principles as to the protection of children from all forms of discrimination. In order to meet the constitutional obligations, the Bangladeshi government has promulgated and enacted or amended relevant acts, laws and legislative measures and formulated policies. It has undertaken a number of programmes and projects for the care and protection of children. The Primary

Education Act 1990 made primary education free and compulsory in respect of both enrolment and attendance for all children.

The National Child Policy 2011 recognises poverty or insolvency as the major barrier to protecting children's rights and emphasises initiatives to eliminate poverty, child labour and violence against children, as well as initiatives that push for the provision of nutrition and health services. The Birth and Death Registration Act 2004 protects the right of children to have a name, identity and nationality irrespective of religion, race, group, or sex. This law also bans child marriage and harmful or unsuitable work, thus ensuring the care and maintenance of male children to age 18 years and females until their marriage. It ensures workers' rights, protects underage children from sex work and trafficking, as well as protecting children under age of 13 from bearing criminal responsibility. The National Education Policy 2010 focuses on admission to school of all children, reducing regional disparity, and introducing new forms of vocational and technical education. It also states a monthly allowance to be given, along with food, for those in the educational programmes. The National Health Policy 2011 ensures health services for all, reducing malnutrition of children and mothers, and reducing child mortality through implementing different programmes. The National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 strives towards the eradication of all forms of child labour by 2015. Children under 14 years of age are prevented from being employed in any commercial and hazardous work. The Family Courts Ordinance 1985 makes fathers liable to maintain children of separated or divorced parents - their sons until 18 and their daughters until marriage. Disabled children are provided with lifelong maintenance by their fathers.

The Children Act 1974 (Draft Amendment of Children Act 2010) provides the only principal law for children in need of care and protection. Its focus is to provide custody, care and treatment of those children who are neglected, destitute, victims of violence and accused children. This Act emphasizes that the institution should be the last resort and should only be a means of short-term rehabilitation. Alternative care provisions, including minimum package of services should be promoted. This law encourages family-based care and protection, considering the best interests of the child with meaningful child participation.

The National Plans of Action (NPA) for children 2005-2009 is another important document aimed at promoting commitments towards children. The NPA emphasizes five thematic areas for care and protection: (1) food and nutrition, (2) health, (3) education and empowerment of the girl child, (4) protection from abuse, exploitation and violence, and (5) physical environment. The NPA contains a programming framework, cross-cutting approaches and issues, governance and management of the NPA for children, and measuring and assessing impact. In addition, the government operates several developmental programmes with national and international NGOs to protect children, such as: Food for Education; Birth Registration; Vaccination; Early Childhood Education; Vocational Training; Child Labour Elimination programmes; HIV prevention programmes; Safe drinking water and sanitation programme; Child Rights Awareness Programme; Protection of Children at Risk.

Children living on the streets are most at risk of abuse and exploitation. They grow up without suitable accommodation, protection, education, health care, food, safe drinking water, security, supervision, recreation and guidance. They may get involved in illegal activities, smuggling and sex work (UNICEF 2009c). Their parents are not in a position to provide appropriate care and protection due to their own poverty and vulnerable position. In order to protect such street children, the Ministry of Social Welfare and UNICEF have implemented the 'Protection of Children at Risk' (PCAR) programme, seeking to improve and expand protection through educational and vocational training, access to safe shelters, health services, counselling and development opportunities.

Children in institutions such as vagrant homes, correctional centres and orphanages are assisted through the activities of PCAR (MOWCA 2007). However, this initiative is too small-scale to support the numbers of children needing this service. Nearly 94 per cent of street children remain without any government or non-government support (*The Daily Star* 2008).

Under the Children Act 1974, the government approves childcare institutions established for the reception, protection and prevention of cruelty to children. The Orphan and Widow Act 1944 defines an 'orphan' as any child under 18 years of age

who has lost his/her father, or who has been abandoned by his/her parents or guardians. Accordingly, all children admitted into orphanages may not necessarily be totally parentless in the strict sense of the term. In addition to government-run facilities, Bangladesh has madrasahs that house and educate orphans, and private or NGO-run orphanages and shelter homes to protect vulnerable children.

The above outline of policy and legislation may seem to suggest that there is a lot of activity and that children are being safeguarded well as a result. Of course, the reality may be far from this aspiration. Encouraged by the promise of international aid, the government has signed up to a raft of child welfare and protection policies, and has introduced wide-ranging laws in this area. However, policies and legislation are not always put into practice (Blanchet 1996). Moreover, NGOs have the power to make their voices heard because they give funds to poor nations, instructing and prescribing countries to implement their own agenda, often without taking into consideration local socio-economic conditions, cultures and/or values (Haque 2002). Wells (2009:1) further argues that childhood is being reshaped by the ‘increasing influence of international laws and international non-governmental organisations’.

### **3.6. Residential Childcare in Bangladesh**

It is unknown exactly when and where institutional residential childcare first began in Bangladesh. Residential childcare institutions have evolved over time from philanthropic and religious considerations, aiming to rescue, protect and support ‘abandoned’, ‘neglected’ and ‘destitute’ children. Early institutional care was attached to faith-based organisations such as churches and mosques. Faith-based educational childcare institutions have dominated child welfare practices for decades, providing children with education and taking care of their wellbeing. As well as this, residential education institutions such as boarding schools were set up in the belief that they provided better academic education, thus ensuring that children of the monied classes eventually gained jobs with status.

There are five kinds of residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh: NGO homes, government institutions, madrasahs, boarding schools and cadet colleges. A short summary of each is provided below.

### **NGO-run homes**

Institutions run by NGOs are a fairly recent arrival on the residential care scene. They rescue destitute children from what are regarded as unhealthy and risky environments and support them to integrate into mainstream society by providing basic needs, as well as creating job opportunities and giving legal support thus ensuring that their rights are met. NGO-run homes are either partially or fully funded by international donor agencies. They all require to be government registered. NGO-run homes across the country tend to cater for the children of sex workers, child sex workers, trafficked, street and disabled children, children involved in drugs, human trafficking and other criminal activity. Residential homes for the children of sex workers tend to provide relatively longer periods of support than other homes due to the greater stigmatization which this group faces from wider society for their birth identity and mothers' profession. Institutions for brothel children tend to be established close to brothel areas making it easier for the mothers to visit. There were 13 such residential children's homes in Bangladesh in 2005 (Alam 2005); the figure is the same today (own experience). The oldest NGO-run home for children of sex workers was set up 15 years ago in 1997. (The largest brothels are situated in Daulatdia in Faridpur district and Kandapara in Tangail district. There are 18 brothels in Bangladesh; most were established during the British colonial period.)

### **Government Shishu Paribar**

The Social Welfare Services of the government of Bengal began before partition in 1943, with the establishment of four state-run orphanages for orphan and abandoned children, with a view to catering for their care, protection and education needs by providing food, shelter and education. This was in response to famines and epidemics in the region. The structure, model and management of these orphanages were greatly influenced by the Dr. Barnardo's model of orphanages in Britain (DSW 2005), a legacy of British colonial influence. These orphanages were regulated by the Education Department up until 1961, when regulatory power was transferred to the newly established Department of Social Welfare. In 1962, the first baby homes were established in Dhaka catering for those under the age of five. Another two baby homes were established in Chittagong and Rajshahi city in 1981 (DSW 2005).

Following the devastating cyclone and war of liberation in 1971, a great number of children were orphaned or abandoned. With the needs of the time, under the direction of the Department of Social Welfare, several government agencies and many international agencies came forward to provide services to protect the well-being of these children, mainly providing immediate care and protection, as well as institutional rehabilitation. The government established 60 shelters to care for the 'victims of independence', especially war widows and their children. The government provided the basic essentials of food, accommodation and healthcare and education for the children. The view was to rehabilitate children into mainstream society, protecting them from further injury by that ensuring their rights, as laid down in the Orphanage and Widow Act of 1944 (DSW 2005) were met.

In 1976, the Department of Social Welfare separated children in care from adults by converting these centres into regular 'orphanages', in order to ensure a better quality of care and support for the residential children. During the 1980s, these orphanages were renamed Shishu Sadan (Children's Home). In 1988, the government restructured these institutions, adopting the SOS Children's Village International model and renamed them Sarkari Shishu Paribar (Government Children's Family) with a view to implementing national and international commitments to children and establishing children's constitutional rights. Under this structure, children in these new institutions live in 'family' groups of 25 children of different ages. Each family is further divided into sub-groups of three to five children who take turns to cook for the whole family on a weekly basis. Families in the boys' institution are looked after by a 'Bhaiya' (elder brother) while a 'Khala Amma' (aunt) looks after girls' families. The idea of forming family units and creating the designation of 'Bhaiya'/'Khala Amma' was to provide a 'family-like' environment within the institution to aid the healthy social development of the children in care.

In addition to government-run orphanages, there are many privately managed orphanages in Bangladesh. These privately-run orphanages were established within the purview of the Orphan and Widow Act 1944, and are registered and managed by the Voluntary Organisations (Registration and Control) Act 1961. At present, the

number of registered private orphanages in the country is about 3,023 (DSW 2005). Most receive a nominal amount of capitation grant for only some of their orphans. In the 2005-06 financial year, a total of 37,500 orphans from 2,631 privately run orphanages were provided capitation grants. The government does try to ensure that the privately run orphanages bring up orphans in an all-round healthy environment (DSW 2005).

### **Madrasahs**

The development of madrasahs and their existence within the Indian sub-continent has been influenced by religious, social and political factors: Islam as a religion; British colonialization; the relationship between Pakistan and India; the approach of political parties; and ‘Western’ versus traditional views (Abdallah *et. al.* 2004; Kabir 2011).

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. The prophet Mohammad (peace be upon Him) himself was an orphan from the age of six, and as such Islam has a whole body of teachings on the rights of orphans. With this in mind, Islamic faith-based orphanages called ‘madrasahs’ were set up to cater for the needs of orphaned and other children. They date back to before British rule in India and are perhaps the oldest form of residential childcare institution in Bangladesh. Madrasahs take in the majority of children requiring residential care. They offer children free room and board as well as an Islamic education. Muslims believe that it is their religious duty, as well as social responsibility to establish madrasahs for community use (Raisuddin 1997).

Madrasah education was at one time the only form of education available in the Muslim world. Both religious and secular education was imparted to students. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD madrasahs were key educational institutions not only for Muslims, but also non-Muslims, by developing into sites of free thinking and reasoning (Ahmad 2005; BEI 2011; Kabir 2011). During the Muslim rule of India, madrasahs were funded through taxation under the patronage of Muslim rulers (Riaz 2011). However, things began to change with the advent of European colonization. The British took this initiative to foster their own interests of instituting effective control

over the whole of India. For this to happen, a class of administrators conversant in British law, not Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence was needed (BEI 2011). As a result the number of madrasahs sharply declined. The source of public funding was lost and madrasahs became increasingly reliant on the goodwill of individuals and the community.

After the departure of the British, the new Pakistani government (with a desire to promote a secular 'Western'-style education system) continued to neglect madrasah education and no public funds were allocated to them. East Pakistan was neglected by the central government in every aspect of development. As a result, some campaigned for independence from Pakistan, while others (including the madrasah leaders) believed in the idea of a united Pakistan and were politically against the independence movement (Rashiduzzaman 1992). After the war of liberation in 1971, Bangladesh became an independent country and the issue of madrasahs and madrasah education became a subject of political debate between those who wanted to assert Bangladeshi identity and those who wanted to assert a Muslim one (Emajuddin and Nazneen 1990). Meanwhile, the madrasahs still did not receive any public funds, even though they took responsibility for the care of the majority of those who had become orphaned during the war of liberation (Ayoub Ali 1983). There are no government restrictions on establishing madrasahs. Rather, they were seen as essential to take care of the huge numbers of orphaned and abandoned Muslim children in Bangladesh. The government today recognises this but offers no material support to them.

It should be noted that a small number of Buddhist, Christian and Hindu residential homes also exist, catering for the needs of minority religious communities. Funding for these also comes from the community rather than the government.

### **Boarding Schools**

These were set up to cater for the children of middle and upper class Bangladeshi families. Their function is to provide bed and board and extra tuition in a residential setting for students wishing to improve their grades in order to enter university. They

are run mainly on a commercial basis. Because boarding schools are not part of my study, I have not explored this more fully.

### **Cadet College**

The Bangladeshi Army runs seven residential ‘cadet’ colleges for children. Children gain admission only after passing a rigorous entrance exam at grade seven. The government hugely subsidizes cadet colleges but guardians are still expected to pay a fee. Fees are calculated on parental income and are on a sliding scale. After passing the grade XII exam, cadets are encouraged to join the various Armed Forces, as commissioned officers. Again, these are not part of my study.

### **3.7. Size and Numbers of the Institutions and Children**

As no census of childcare institutions has ever been undertaken in Bangladesh, it is difficult to know exactly the size, numbers of childcare institutions, and numbers of children living in them. The government keeps data only on those institutions it runs and some basic data on those for whom it provides partial financial assistance. There is no accurate data available about the number of childcare institutions run by NGOs or community institutions. Whilst data is highly unreliable, there are numerous more or less informed estimates about the numbers of childcare institutions, their size and the numbers of children. The sizes of the institutions vary enormously. Numbers of children and young people resident in each institution range from between 100-200 in the NGOs, 100-200 in the government institutions and 100-4000 in the madrasahs.

UNICEF estimates that there are more than 49,000 children in residential care in Bangladesh (UNICEF 2008), but this figure fails to include the many thousands of children living in madrasahs. It is estimated that 800 children from brothels live in 13 NGO-run institutions (Alam 2005) but there is no information about the other categories of children, for example, trafficked, juvenile justice or drug addicts, nor the numbers of institutions catering for such children. Currently there are 84 Government Shishu Paribars (41 for girls, 43 for boys and 1 mixed), with 10,300 children, six baby homes for 525 abandoned babies and three homes for 750 destitute children run by the government (DSS 2012).

A complex situation exists as to the numbers of madrasahs and children in them. As of 2005, there were 9,000 Aliya madrasahs and 15,000 listed Qaumi madrasahs, totalling 24,000 (*The Daily Star*, 4 August 2005) (See Appendix 3). Ahmad (2005) estimates the total number of madrasahs as 13,406. Bano (2007) estimates that there were approximately 15,000 registered madrasahs in Bangladesh with 4 million students in 2006, with a sharp rise to 64,000 if unregistered ones were included. BEI (2011) estimates a registered number of 15,800 madrasahs, cautioning that the figure could range between 50,000 to 60,000 if unregistered madrasahs are included. While it is very hard to conclude the numbers of childcare institutions and the children in them, it can easily be said, from the estimated data available that there are huge numbers of children living in child care institutions in Bangladesh.

### **3.8. Reasons why Children are Placed in Care Institutions**

Children are placed in care institutions for a myriad of reasons: family poverty; being orphaned; risks to their safety and security; parental religious motivation and values; family dislocation; parents' inability to cope, often as a result of some form of crisis or hardship. In Bangladesh however, most children are in institutions for material benefits: free education, food, accommodation and healthcare, due to parental poverty. Bangladeshi parents, like most parents around the world want to give their child a better life than they had. Giving them up to institutional care may seem the best and only option available to them. Some children are placed in institutions by rescuing them from a detrimental environment, for example, a brothel. Other children are sent to residential care institutions for education for a better life in the future. Parents' strong religious motivation may also provide a reason for placing children in an institution.

#### **NGO-run homes**

There are many reasons why sex workers send their children to institutions. Poverty and lack of alternatives provides a strong driver for sex workers in sending their children into NGO institutions. Moreover, sex workers' children are often unwelcome in local schools and prevented from mixing with the local community due to their birth identity, mother's profession and lack of etiquette needed for the so-called 'good society'. Many mothers see the brothel environment as unhealthy for

the development of their child and as a breeding ground of criminality. Brothel violence puts them and their children at risk and they feel insecure. Moreover, children witness vice and are likely to be influenced by it. The brothel represents a danger for children, increasing their likelihood of getting involved in prostitution, and being affected by sexual abuse/exploitation at a tender age. Many mothers do not want to see the lives of their children ruined, as theirs was. Thus they see the institution as an escape route for their child, giving their child access to a possible better life. Mothers hope that their children will eventually be accepted by society with the new identity and qualifications they gain, that they will no longer be discriminated against due to their birth identity and mother's profession. Many also hope to leave their profession once their children are educated and settled (own experience).

Mothers also, however, 'buy into' NGO 'awareness-raising programmes' on child development and the negative consequences of children being involved in prostitution, drug, alcohol and other illegal activities, as well as the material, social and emotional benefits available to NGO children. They send their children to the NGO home because it caters only for the children of sex workers and gives both mothers and children opportunities to get involved in community activities.

### **Government Shishu Paribars**

Family poverty is also one of the main reasons for sending children to government institutions, as parents hope to gain material benefits and protection both in the present and the future, including the provision of education, shelter, food and, possibly, better marriage and employment prospects (Doná and Islam 2003; DSW 2005). Another study identified that parents were concerned about their children's safety and protection from deviant activity (BEI 2011). This was particularly the case for girls. The death of the husband, financial difficulties and knowing that others from the local area were also sending their children to live in institutions influenced their decision to enrol their child at an institution. Anecdotal evidence suggests that boys were more likely to be placed in institutions for educational purposes, while girls were admitted because their mothers feared for their safety from local hooligans (own experience).

By law, only orphaned and abandoned children can be admitted into government institutions. However, disadvantaged and poor parents sometimes enrol their children by hiding their identity. Also, because of the need for adult support, bribery and patronage, most orphans do not manage to access the facility. Doná and Islam (2003) found that the majority of children in government institutions had a mother but their fathers are absent, supporting Hoque's earlier (1991) findings that 85 per cent of children in orphanages had living mothers.

We need to remember that only a minority of children outside parental care live in institutions. The majority of children who are not cared for by their parents live in the community with relatives, in slums, on the streets and in the homes of rich people as domestic servants. Blanchet (1996) argues that children without either parent are more likely to be found as domestic workers than entering institutions since they do not have the necessary adult support and patronage to access such facilities.

### **Madrasahs**

There is a perception that children from relatively poor, including destitute, families get admission into madrasahs more readily. The basis for this perception is that madrasahs usually do not charge poor, wretched or orphaned children for education, bed and board. Ahmad (2005) found that the overwhelming majority of children (especially in Qaumi madrasahs: 82%) were from poor families from rural and small town areas. They could not send their children to modern schools either because they are not within easy access or were not affordable in terms of tuition costs, books and other related expenses. Students in Aliya madrasahs, on the other hand, came from a more diverse background, including lower-middle class families. Although poverty was the single most given reason for children being in institutional care, Abdallah *et al.* (2004) found diverse reasons for why children were in madrasahs. They found that only 10.3 per cent parents sent their children to madrasahs due to poverty, rather interestingly over 93 per cent enrolled their children because of a strong sense of religion and values, as well as a belief that madrasahs were superior to mainstream educational institutions.

BEI (2011) confirmed in its recent study that children in madrasahs came from a wide range of backgrounds: better off; secularly educated; and expatriate families. They also found that parents sent their children to the madrasah in order to better secure a chance of job access later on in life. They found that madrasah education up to Dakhil (secondary) level increased the chances of male children getting a job in a mosque or madrasah. It also brought them respect from the wider community. Moreover, many Bangladeshi madrasah graduates from the Qaumi system manage to find jobs in Middle Eastern mosques and maktabas. The Qaumi system therefore has a competitive edge that is favoured by many parents in Bangladesh.

Supporting the other issues mentioned, Kabir (2011) states that many parents send their children to the madrasah in order to preserve a Muslim cultural identity which came into being during the colonial period. They believe that madrasahs reaffirm, strengthen and preserve Islamic faith and practices in their children, which they feel are increasingly being threatened by the rise of a secular culture and the penetration of alien values into Bangladesh. This group of parents strongly opposes secular education and wants to regain control over religious spheres in order to construct a Muslim selfhood through continued interaction with Muslim communities, sometimes by controlling social and religious networking in the locality and beyond. Kabir also argues that sending children to the madrasah is the result of a failure of public schools to accommodate the mounting numbers of Muslim children and the lack of religious and moral education in schools.

There are a number of less frequent, but also interesting, reasons why children are living in madrasahs. Many Bangladeshi families enrol at least one male child into the madrasah because they believe that this is necessary to bring Allah's blessings onto the family. Also, madrasahs have a 'better' disciplining system, so that trouble-making children are sent to madrasahs to improve their behaviour. There is also a belief held by certain circles of society that madrasah education is easier; hence some will send children deemed less intelligent to madrasahs. There is finally a perception that drop-outs from the general stream of educational institutions are admitted into madrasahs because of their relatively easier admission procedures.

Overall, the societal background of children in residential care institutions is changing. By and large, the commonplace notion that poorer parents send their children to institutions remains valid, similar to that in other Asian countries such as Mizoram (Lalzallana 2008), Indonesia (Martin and Sudrajat 2007) and Sri Lanka (Jayathilake and Harini 2005). But changes are taking place because of the numbers of well-to-do families sending their children to madrasahs.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an historical background to Bangladesh's residential care sector. As a majority world country with aspirations of becoming modern, it has 'bought into' the idea that education will bring progress, development and wealth to its average citizen. Predominately still an agriculturally-based economy, it is becoming industrialised with increasing numbers of people entering the factory and office environment, as opposed to doing back-breaking work in the fields. Those who have secured an education enter a world of easier work and better pay. The upper middle-classes have always managed to educate their children to enter this materially-comfortable world. The working classes now also aspire towards that. They see education as the key and find ways to get it for their children. If they cannot afford to pay for their children to go to school themselves they use other means: the opportunities provided by madrasahs, NGOs and government residential homes.

Although the political situation in the country remains unstable, in that democracy has not yet been realized, the country has signed the UNCRC and taken steps to reinforce and ensure the rights of children to thrive and develop. The Bangladeshi Constitution also safeguards the interests of disadvantaged children by providing basic essentials. With this in mind, residential childcare institutions have evolved over time, from philanthropic and religious beginnings with the more recent introduction of government institutions and NGO homes.

# Research Design, Methodology and Implementation

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and method adopted for this study. It opens with a discussion of qualitative research methodology and outlines the justification for an ethnographic approach. The chapter then moves on to my fieldwork, beginning with an examination of the approach which I employed for getting permission to undertake the study and gaining access to the institutions and young people who had left care. There is then a detailed presentation of methods of data collection, data analysis, establishing reliability and validity, and triangulation. There is also a discussion of ethical, safety, security and practical issues. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on my research experience.

### 4.2. The Research Design: Qualitative Methodology and Ethnographic Approach

Qualitative research sets out to examine people's daily life experiences of human relationships (Flick 2002) and to understand 'the actions of the participants on the basis of their active experience of the world and the ways in which their actions arise from and reflect back on experience' (Allan and Skinner 1991:177). In other words, researchers try to understand people's thinking and behaviour (Arksey and Knight 1999:10) and 'learn from the people' (Spradley 1980:3) in their natural settings (Hammersley 1998). Hakim (1987:26) states that qualitative research offers:

Richly descriptive reports of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behaviour; displays how these are put together, more or less coherently and consciously, into frameworks which make sense of their experiences; and illuminates the motivations which connect attitudes and behaviour, the discontinuities, or even contradictions, between attitudes and behaviour, or how conflicting attitudes and motivations are resolved and particular choices made.

The aim of my study was to explore young people's leaving-care experiences from their own viewpoints. Many research studies (e.g. Christensen and James 2000; Hill

and Tisdall 1997; Shaw and Gould 2001) have shown that qualitative methods, such as focus group discussions, participant observation and interviews are more useful than quantitative methods for listening meaningfully to the voices of children and understanding their experiences as active participants. Moreover, qualitative social research such as participant observation and interviews adds positive value to social work research and practice because of their similarities with a social worker's daily practice with the person they support (Scott 2000). For these reasons, a qualitative research design was appropriate for my study.

### **4.3. The Research Methods**

Blaikie (2000) defines research methods as techniques in which data are collected, managed and analysed to answer research questions. In selecting methods, the major consideration is to determine how to develop a reliable research tool which ensures that data can be gathered and analysed in an effective way, while limiting the extent to which researcher-bias is introduced (Ince 2004).

In order to address my research questions, I adopted different methods of data collection, using a child-centred approach, believing that children are experts in their own lives, capable and competent and have an understanding of the dynamics of the environments in which they live (Brannen and O'Brien 1996; James 1999; Qvortrup *et al.*, 2009). Focus group discussions, participant observation and in-depth face-to-face interviews were all used in my study. Focus group discussions gave me initial background information, while participant observation allowed me to talk with young people in their locality, providing me with opportunities to observe and understand their situations, feelings and stories. One-to-one interviews allowed me to explore young people's experiences in greater depth.

#### **4.3.1. Focus Group Discussions**

Focus groups, according to Kitzinger (1994:103), are 'group discussions organised to explore people's views and experiences on a specific set of issues'. Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) and Krueger (1994) describe focus group discussions as valuable tools for exploring and acquiring perceptions of a distinct subject and understanding how points of view are constructed and expressed. Farquhar and Das (1999) suggest

that focus group discussions are useful for discussing sensitive issues; that participants are more likely to self-disclose and open up than if they were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. It is even suggested that some participants experience a thrill from this type of open discussion about sensitive topics (Morgan and Krueger 1993). Furthermore, Kitzinger and Barbour (1999), Krueger (1994) and Bloor *et al.* (2001) argue that focus group discussions promote diversity of communication from participants, support and accelerate open discussion about uncomfortable issues and show respect for all participants' opinions and recommendations, besides giving space to clarify conflicting and confusing ideas if they arise. There are, of course, disadvantages in conducting focus group discussions: the researcher may have less control over data produced than in one-to-one interviews (Morgan 1988), and a dominant member may bias the results obtained or participants may feel shy or unable to express their opinions in the presence of other participants (Bloor *et al.* 2001; Krueger 1994). However, Morgan (1988) argues that this can be controlled by strong management by the focus group discussion facilitator.

My aim in conducting the focus group discussions was, as already stated, to get background information and to facilitate the access to the research proper, which in my instance, meant contact with young people themselves.

#### **4.3.2. Participant Observation**

There are many ways in which 'participant observation' can be undertaken. The researcher might be a complete participant, a total observer, an observer as participant, and participant as observer (Gans 1982; Marshall and Rossman 1995).

My role was a combination of 'participant as observer', and 'observer as participant'. The appeal of this method was that it gave me access to a vast richness of qualitative data on everyday occurrences, interactions and problems (Berridge and Brodie 1988). In addition, it was the best way to see what young people saw, to feel what they felt and to understand what they thought about their care experiences (Mauthner 1997). I spent a significant amount of time in residential institutions developing trusting relationships with staff and young people, in order to understand the existing

systems, processes and practices of preparation for leaving care, and to reach young people who had already left care. I also spent time with young people in their locality (own homes, workplaces, educational institutions, cafes and parks) to develop relationships of trust, with a view to construct meanings (Flick 2002) from young people's action in real situations (Burgess 1984:79). This helped me to compare and contrast my understanding and young people's views on what they said happened, and what actually did happen.

It is important to consider participation observation reflexively; to explore not only the role that I was taking, but also the 'selves' I was bringing to those roles, and the impact that this might have on others (Reinharz 1997). It is evident that in conducting the research, I found myself, at times, playing the part of 'native' (someone who knew little and needed to be 'taught' something), senior child welfare practitioner (someone who knew a lot, who held seniority and, to an extent, power over others), 'male' and 'father', depending on circumstances and needs. Sometimes this was a conscious decision by me, to take a particular approach with an individual or situation; at other times, I was only able to access this realisation as I reflected later on an interaction between myself and another adult or young person. Being around the research settings for an extended period, however, allowed for some fluidity of roles and helped to undermine any notion that I was an external researcher imposing my project on others.

#### **4.3.3. Research Interviews**

Qualitative interviews are not simple conversations or discussions; rather they are conversations 'with a purpose' (Burgess 1984:102). Purposeful conversations allow researchers to explore the meaning and experiences of people's lives, routines and feelings (Rubin and Rubin 1995), which reflect their past and present (Rapley 2004:16). Shaw and Gould (2001) argue that semi-structured interviews with a more or less pre-determined purpose and agenda give the opportunity to explore the in-depth experiences and perceptions of participants (see also Arksey and Knight 1999; Cassell and Symon 2004). They are 'particularly useful', states Taylor (2006:70) in exploring experiences that cannot be adequately described in close-ended questions. In contrast, Christensen and James (2000) claim that unstructured interviews with

children and young people are most useful for gathering information, allowing them more freedom and control to articulate their experiences.

In light of the time and resources available to me, I decided to adopt a semi-structured, guided interview approach and combine it with some open-ended questions within the interviews. I also decided to modify questions if necessary and ‘consider what was appropriate in the context of specific interview situations’ (Taylor 2006:70). In order to develop the interview schedule, I drew on three sources of inspiration: firstly, theoretical concepts (and, in particular, the notion from the ecological systems approach that children’s lives need to be understood in the context of wider family and social factors); secondly, issues that had emerged in the review of existing research on children’s leaving care experiences (as discussed in Chapter Two); and thirdly, ideas from my own professional experience of residential childcare over many years. The final result was a schedule that covered the following topics:

- Background
- Entry
- Overall experiences
- Education and training
- Healthcare, exercise and recreation
- Relationships
- Rules and regulations
- Preparation for leaving care and throughcare
- Aftercare
- Future direction
- Ending

I decided not to use other common methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, that were not suitable for my purpose of exploring the detailed experience of young people’s preparation for and leaving care, and after care. Face-to-face interviews would also give me access to additional insight through considering participants’ non-verbal interaction.

#### **4.4. The Fieldwork Experiences**

In this section, I discuss the process and approaches which I employed in getting started; gaining access to the institutions and young people who had left care; and how I collected data through participant observation and through research interviews.

##### **4.4.1. Getting Started**

The preparation phase started through developing my research proposal. As four institutions were being studied in this research, I firstly telephoned representative members of these institutions to find out the challenges of gaining access to institutions and to young people who had left care. I learnt that in order to gain access into the government institutions I needed to contact the Director General of the Department of Social Welfare. For the madrasah I needed to contact the president and superintendent. In the NGO, I knew that I would need to talk to its Executive Director.

During discussions, both with government officials and the madrasah committee, I was asked: ‘Will you monitor our daily activities and accounts? Will you publish your findings in the newspaper? How will your research benefit us?’ Such questions made it clear to me that access would not be granted easily. Indeed, I became concerned about whether the authorities (superintendents, managers, principals and staff) would cooperate with me once permission was eventually obtained. As it was impossible to foresee future outcomes, I left with the hope that once I arrived in Bangladesh, my personal contacts and previous work connections within this field would enable me to gain access to my target group.

##### **4.4.1.1. Getting Permission for the Study**

Gaining permission for access was not easy; I had to involve every connection I could muster. My personal contacts, previous involvement with NGOs and familiarity with the system helped to speed up the process. Permission from the NGO children’s home was easier because of my previous involvement with that organisation. However, I needed to negotiate with the acting principal and win the trust of the staff to capture the real picture of the daily practices of the home and to reach those who had left care. In the government institutions, two factors helped in

gaining permission: I discovered that the Director General of the Department of Social Welfare held a political ideology similar to mine and also that my uncle was his line manager when he worked in a different ministry. Both these factors helped build personal connections. Fortuitously, I also discovered that the district's Social Welfare Assistant Director was a friend of my Executive Director. He persuaded the Assistant Director to help me. Finally, I did not need the Director General's written permission as the District Assistant Director approved my application. By law, the Deputy Director of the district was supposed to approve my application but the Assistant Director did it on her behalf because she was his wife! Again as with the NGO home, I needed to negotiate with the superintendents of the government institutions. A phone call by the Assistant Director to the superintendents and my personal link to the Director General helped to overcome this hurdle. The president of the madrasah was the authority to allow my access. He was a retired physician and said that I could carry out my research. But his permission was not enough; I needed to get permission from the madrasah secretary. Once the president and secretary gave their verbal permissions, I approached the superintendents. One superintendent's brother worked in my home district and that link helped me to gain access into the madrasah.

Finally, permission was granted from the Executive Director, Deputy Director and president for gaining access into the NGO children's home, government institutions and madrasah respectively. A fuller discussion of how I gained access to the institutions is in Appendix 1. In the next section, I discuss how I gained access to the young people who had left care.

#### **4.4.1.2. Gaining Access to the Young People**

After gaining access to the institutions, the major task was to find ways to meet my target group and involve them in my research. It was comparatively easy to gain access to the NGO's young people due to my previous involvement with that organisation, and the unrestricted access to it and local knowledge. The other institutions were not so easy.

The superintendents from the government institutions agreed to provide me with the names of young people who fulfilled my inclusion criteria (13 to 26 year olds, with a minimum of one year's in-care experience, having left care not more than five years before). Both institutions controlled access to young people in different ways e.g. by not providing lists of young people who had left care or making incomplete lists, and by taking their time to inform me of their decisions. This delayed and affected my other schedules and the selection of young people they provided. I believe they listed only their 'good students', those whom they believed would 'represent' the institution in a positive light. Nevertheless, a few members of staff personally took it upon themselves to remove bureaucratic blocks by providing useful information (e.g. contact details of young people). In some cases, they even arranged meetings with care-leavers for me, and introduced me to the siblings of some of the care leavers so that I could gain access to them.

The madrasah's superintendents were quite restrictive in passing on information about their ex-residents and eventually did not provide me with a single young person's contact details. I believe this was because of the political unrest in Bangladesh at the time. Accusations that madrasahs were producing religious extremists were rife in the media. During my preliminary stage, the young people at the madrasah seemed unable to trust me (they may have thought I was a spy). However, as my visits continued, I was able to build trusting relationships with them, and through this, was able to gain access to young people.

I also accessed additional informants through 'snowballing' (Atkinson and Flint 2001). This approach relies on meeting potential interviewees through those previously interviewed, and may counter-balance the effect of e.g. only using staff to make contact with young people. Essentially, I gained access to young people by adopting a variety of strategies. Access was not straightforward since 'gatekeepers' existed at many levels, although my experience helped to combat bureaucratic difficulties. Indeed, my 'insider' status, knowledge of different government mechanisms and familiarity with the different institutions and locality helped me greatly in gaining access.

The strategies which I adopted to gain access all had some ethical implications, risks and safety issues for me and the young people involved, which I discuss later in this chapter.

#### **4.4.2. Data Collection**

As already discussed, I used focus group discussions, participant observation and in-depth interviews in this study.

##### **4.4.2.1. Focus Group Discussions with Young People**

My original plan was to conduct one focus group in each institution, with five to nine participants who had left care; this is the ideal number identified by many social science researchers who claim that such a number allows for all voices to be heard (Bloor *et al.* 2001; Krueger 1994). Unfortunately, this was not possible. Those from the government institutions were not interested in sharing their experiences in a group situation. The madrasah's young people were afraid to take part for fear that the police might arrest them; in their eyes any gathering, including a focus group discussion, was suspect. (The police may have thought that they were coming together to plot against the government or that they had connections with religious extremist groups.) Hence the only focus group discussion which I was able to carry out was with the children from the NGO. Five young people volunteered to participate.

My target-group was young people between the ages of 13 and 26, who had left care within a five-year period and who had resided in the home for at least one year. Young people were briefed on the aims and objectives of my research before recruitment. During the recruitment stage, participants were also asked if they were aware of any others who fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

At the beginning of the focus group discussion, I set out ground rules, informed and shared my research aims and objectives, as well as my capacity and limitations with the participants. A tape-recorder was used during our consultation, with prior permission, and I made sure that participants had access to turn it on and off if they wanted. Unfortunately, the discussion was not recorded fully due to batteries dying.

I asked participants to begin with their own stories of how life was for them when they first came into the residential care home. From there, I asked them to move on to their in-care experiences and finally to talk about their lives as they were now. I wanted to explore their common, everyday lives, relationships with staff, methods of control used by staff, functions and practices used to help them prepare for leaving care and their experiences of leaving care.

The participants' answers were often short. One young person tended to lead the discussion and all participants appeared to pay attention to him. This was an expected risk. However, in order to create an opportunity for other participants, I gently restrained the vocal individual and encouraged quieter members to share their feelings and experiences. Most participants felt uncomfortable recalling life in the home, comparing it with their present life. They hoped their opinions might have an impact on policy-makers, once my study was completed.

#### **4.4.2.2. Observations in the Institutions and with the Young People**

The main objectives of participant observation in the institutions were to see and understand how they functioned in general and how, in particular, they prepared young people for leaving care. I also hoped to find ways of reaching those who had already left care to encourage them to participate in my research.

Once I was granted permission to visit the institutions and the young people, I reflected on what my role at the institutions would be because young people who had left care was my target group, not the residents. Would the staff and resident children feel comfortable in my presence? What expectations would they have of me? Would I be able to serve their needs and interests in any way? It was too early to capture all the uncertainties. Marshall and Rossman (1989:65) suggest that 'entry negotiation requires time, patience and sensitivity to the rhythms and norms of a group'. I decided to concentrate on how to become accepted by actively listening, which Noddings (1984:34) describes as 'a pre-creative mode characterized by outer quietude and inner voices and images, by absorption and sensory concentration.'

During my initial visit to the NGO home, I was formally introduced to the young people in a gathering. They were informed of my 'identity as a researcher', and my role and responsibility while I was with them. I was not sure whether the younger children actually understood this, but over time, I made sure that my role in the institution was clearly understood. Likewise in the government boys' institution, I was introduced by a member of staff to a gathering, this time to a group of children in the playing-field. Such an opportunity was not offered to me in the madrasah but staff did not prevent me from introducing myself to the children and young people. During the introductions, I explained why I was there and my role as a researcher to children both individually and collectively. I explained what I wanted of them and what they could expect from me. At the NGO home, a few children knew me from the past and they informed other residents about me. Some overtly curious and courageous individuals asked me directly about my past role at the home.

I eventually visited each institution on repeated occasions, between early morning and late evening, over a ten-month period. I also stayed for two nights at the NGO home. (The other institutions were unable to accommodate me overnight because of existing policies or lack of accommodation). Generally, children took my presence as given, since they knew that without the permission of those in authority, I would not have been allowed access to them or their institutions. Nevertheless, during my discussions with them, I informally asked for their consent in being allowed to talk to them and participate in their daily activities whenever I needed to. Most agreed, nevertheless I did assure them that I would only participate in activities with their permission. Even though I tried to make clear my role as a researcher, a good number of children believed they would be quoted in my research and thus the deficiencies of their institutions would be resolved, improving the situation of those who had left care. I tried to be honest with them, stating that I was conducting research to establish a clearer picture of young people's preparation and leaving care experiences in order to complete my studies; that it would not necessarily change their situation.

In the end, I took part in most of the children's activities, helping residents prepare meals, helping with homework, showing solidarity with their 'wells and woes' (a

commonly-used expression in Bangladesh), sharing jokes, and taking part in sports and educational and recreational activities and outings. I felt acceptance from the children and young people once they started sharing stories of their daily life experiences and allowing me to participate in their activities. I had many informal conversations with the residents, and asked them if they could help me to find more young people who had left care to take part in my research. I found that playing games, sharing jokes and even showing solidarity with the children helped to create a relaxed, unthreatening environment for them. In fact, they started to count me as one of their team while in the playing field or as a comrade with whom they could share their thoughts and feelings. During such times the identity of the researcher and the researched receded, as I became a 'team-mate' or 'supportive adult-figure' (see also Emond's (2000) study). These times were precious in developing a friendly and trusting relationship with the young people. Sharing personal stories immediately helped to reduce power differences between us. Children asked me many personal questions about my life, my likes and dislikes, my education, job and about studying in a foreign land. This reminded me of Emond's (2000:97) statement 'I was the recipient of the questions, I was the interviewee and they (young people) were the interviewer'.

Even though I was granted permission from the authorities of the institution and got some sort of acceptance by the children and young people, I was in a dilemma about the intensity of the participant-observation in the institutions since my main target group was young people who had left care, not residents. However, I knew that if I was unable to develop a trusting, friendly relationship with staff and residents, it might not be possible for me to reach my main target group (see Polsky 1962). Also, if I did not spend sufficient time in understanding the 'rhythm and rhymes' of the institution then I would not be able to fully understand the young people's experiences.

It was hard for me not to intervene in many of the daily practices of the NGO home and the government institutions due to my career background and the children's expectations of me. Nevertheless, I kept this in check by reminding myself of my

role as 'researcher'. In addition, it is probably helpful to think of me, during my participant visits, as occupying the role of 'friend' to staff and 'supportive adult-figure' to children, rather than as supervisor, leader or observer (Fine and Sandstorm 1988).

During the initial stages, I carried a pen and notebook to the institutions, in order to write down short notes or descriptions (Clifford 1990) as opportunities arose. Fieldnotes are what Schatzman and Strauss (1973:110) refer to as 'observational notes'. They argue that these should record the 'events experienced principally through watching and listening. They contain as little interpretation as possible and are as reliable as the observer can construct them.' However, taking notes became problematic because staff and children felt uncomfortable or anxious, especially after unexpected events or activities occurred, such as when staff had shouted at a child, or when children had misbehaved with staff, fellow residents or community people, or when other problems arose on a daily basis, such as problems due to staff negligence, shortcomings, malpractice or the breaking of everyday routines. Children or staff would want to see what I had written in my notebook, causing me to feel uncomfortable in taking notes. At these times, I became an active observer and listener, rather than taking conspicuous notes, in order to avoid unnecessary stress and tension for staff, children and myself, so no-one felt threatened. As soon after such an event as I could, I would write short-notes in a private place (often the toilet!) on scraps of paper, then write up these as a fuller account later. Ottenberg (1990) has called these 'head notes' and 'scratch notes'.

Although my access was granted by the different layers of 'gatekeeper' and accepted by most of the children and staff, I learned that I too was under constant surveillance. Some children had been ordered by staff to spy on me. Indeed, some staff made it clear that they did not like my constant presence in their institution. They feared that I might make a complaint against them to their managers or other law enforcing authorities. Even children said that at the beginning they did not like me taking notes while I was with them. They were anxious about what I was writing and whether I

was going to complain about them to the management. However, over time, they began to feel less threatened.

Staff also became used to my presence. In the beginning, I needed to listen to staff about what I could and could not do; I knew that without their support, I would not be able to reach either the resident children or the care leavers. During early visits to the homes I built my confidence and gradually 'homed' into my specific tasks in the institutions. I learnt about children's education; diet and healthcare provided by the institutions; the management and methods of control; how staff occupied their time; staff sensitivity towards children's problems; relationships between and amongst staff and children, links between families, school, neighbours and the community; their perceptions and attitudes towards the wider society and the institutions.

During the initial stages, I asked staff for counsel before attempting any action, considering myself a novice learner. Later on, I began to take my own decisions. I recall one situation in the government boys' institution where one staff-member scolded a boy in front of me, for not returning the daily newspaper. I could see the boy was embarrassed and upset about being reprimanded in front of me. I sat near him during the afternoon session while he watched his friends play cricket and tried to cheer him up. The next day the same staff member told me he did not appreciate my talking to the boy. He said the boy needed to learn how to use communal resources properly, and to develop responsibility. Though my intention had been to help the boy, his intention had been to teach the boy 'responsibility'. I reminded myself of my position as a learner, and realised that I needed to be conscious of when I should intervene. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:89) suggest that 'it is only through watching, listening, asking questions, formulating hypotheses, and making blunders that the ethnographer can acquire some sense of the social structure of the setting and begin to understand the culture of the participants.' Blunders such as the one I describe, were definitely factors shaping my growing understanding of the system, process, practice and culture within the institutions.

As my research continued, another concern was the frequency of my visits to the institutions and the young people, and their duration. Guba and Lincoln (1989:237) emphasise that a researcher should spend enough time in the field to 'overcome the effects of misinformation to uncover constructions and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context's culture'. In an effort to immerse myself in the institutional culture, I visited institutions twice per week and each care leaver at least once. The visits were conducted at various times of the day, lasting between three and sixteen hours. Each institution had a different routine. The madrasah's day started at 3 am, whereas the government institutions and the NGO home's day started with morning prayers, at around 6am. I therefore developed my visiting-schedule to capture the full 24-hour life-cycle of the institutions. Children were surprised to see me in their institution before they woke in the mornings and remain with them until they went to bed.

Over time, I gradually spent less time in the institutions and more time with those who had left care, conducting interviews. I visited young people who had left care in their own spaces: own home, children's home, parental home, mosque, workplace, playing field. The observations of these young people were relatively shorter than in the institutions because of time constraints, cultural considerations and the children's own priorities. However, observing and interacting with them in their own space, over a period of ten months, did provide me with understandings of their aftercare experience, how they coped with their current situation, their feelings, their family life, their stigmatization. For example, I wanted to interview one young married woman in her marital home, but she refused to meet there due to fears that it would raise questions and risk disclosing her care identity, something her in-laws were unaware of. She preferred that we met at her mother's home. Similarly, a young couple who had spent time in the NGO home welcomed me into their own home, but warned me to say I was their relative if any neighbour asked who I was. I had to be prepared to have several identities: uncle, brother, teacher or senior staff member of the NGO, to face any challenges that arose during the interview period.

Overall, reflecting on my experience, I would suggest that the idea of ‘participant observation’ was much easier in theory than in execution. It felt a constant battle between me ‘the person’ and me ‘the researcher’: what to wear, what to carry, where to sit, how to behave, how to maintain trust and develop relations, whether I should intervene in any activity. I felt that I was either a risk to the children, the staff and institutions, or too emotional for them. The hair on my head and beard turned grey and the amount of hair-loss increased significantly as my fieldwork progressed!

#### **4.4.2.3. Interviewing the Young People**

I contacted and spoke to 115 young people, 37 staff members and 15 senior professionals. In the end, I interviewed 33 young people who had left care and the results of these interviews formed the primary data (NGO: 12, Government: 10 and Madrasah: 11). I have not carried out detailed analysis of the data gathered from staff and senior professionals; rather they provided me with insights to help me understand better the young people’s experiences.

Personal contact and ‘snowballing’ allowed me to reach care leavers: personal contact worked well in the NGO, but a snowballing approach was necessary for the government institutions and madrasah. Fortunately, the majority of young people had access to mobile phones, which enabled me to keep in regular contact with them until my interviews were completed.

When I received information about prospective interviewees, I met them first to check that they fitted my inclusion criteria (see 4.4.2.1 second paragraph). If they did, I explained my research aims and objectives and asked them to participate in my study. I gave them time to think about taking part. I encouraged all participants to call or leave a message if they had any questions or concerns. For those who did not fit my inclusion criteria, I asked if they knew of other potential candidates who would be interested in taking part. I spoke to all potential participants several times and met them at least twice, in order to get to know each other before the actual interview. During my subsequent contact, conversations and meetings I tried to answer any questions and to allay fears which they had concerning me, my research, the risks and benefits to them, and the specifics regarding the interviews. These

conversations helped to build relationships and to overcome participants' shyness and suspicion, thus enabling them to come to a decision as to whether they wanted to take part in the study or not. Moreover, the young people also needed to get to know me and my research, as this was their first experience of being interviewed. Once they had agreed to take part, we decided on a mutually convenient time and venue for an interview.

All participants looked nervous at the beginning of the formal interview, but, once the interview progressed, they usually became more comfortable quite quickly, and began to share their experiences in great detail. By the end of interview, I could often see either excitement or scepticism. Some felt empowered to support me by contributing their experience and time; others were not sure what positive impact this study would have on their lives. Another group was happy merely to relate their story. Some informed me that if I needed more young people to interview, they would recommend their friends to get involved.

I started each interview with the traditional greeting of 'Assalamu alaikum<sup>4</sup>'. Many children were clearly surprised and pleased by this, because in Bangladeshi culture it is customary for the junior person to greet first. However, religion does not have any age restriction. By greeting them first, I was giving them honour, and this would have been understood by all the informants. I then went on to carefully explain the research aims, what would happen to the information they provided, confidentiality issues and the limits of the research. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any point of the interview. The majority of interviews were tape-recorded with prior consent, but I explained that the young people had full autonomy to access the on/off switch. I hoped that this would make them feel more comfortable and empowered. I allowed them to play with the recorder for a while.

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<sup>4</sup> An expression that Muslims say whenever they meet one another. It is a greeting translated as 'Peace be upon you.'

Following this, I encouraged the participants to talk about their lives and experiences, starting from the first day they entered the institution to the present. Some of them spoke at great length, while others were very brief. During this phase, some already shared interesting accounts answering many of my questions. I was conscious throughout to avoid technical jargon (Kvale 1996) when asking questions so that the informants would understand exactly what I was asking, and I kept my questions short and simple (Bourgh *et al.* 1999). The key issues I was interested in related to their care history; daily routines in the institutions; education, lodging, food, healthcare; relationships with friends and staff; methods of control; staff quality and efficiency; contact with parents and relatives; contact with the outside community and neighbourhood; opportunities to develop social networks; systems, processes and practices employed by the institutions to prepare young people to leave care; and their after-care experiences (see Appendix 4). I posed probing questions, asking participants to clarify answers if appropriate (Bourgh *et al.* 1999).

Throughout the interview process I took a non-directive approach, and tried to be as attentive and sensitive a listener and note-taker as possible, to understand the participants' experiences without trying to cross the 'emotional borderline' (Grinyer 2005) as a researcher. However, it was not enough to be 'sensitive', 'kind' or 'a good listener', since many of them had gone through painful pasts, including being evicted from institutions. Although I did a lot of preparation for framing questions sensitively, my sensitivity proved insufficient in a number of cases, so that emotions ran high for both the interviewees and me throughout the process. In some situations, I tried to hide my emotions by remaining silent or taking long pauses, so that the interviewee and I had time to become ready for the next discussion point. I must stress that each young person's experience was different and unique, and that the variety of institutions I researched made the research situation more complicated. It is impossible to properly compare and contrast every aspect of the young people's experiences. Yet this complexity was also the beauty of the experience; within it, many an untold story unfolded.

At the end of an interview, we reviewed the interview together and discussed feelings. I played back part of the recording for the young person to hear what they had said. They were excited to hear their own voices, as it was the first time for many of them. I think that this helped to ease the tension that had been generated during the course of the interview. However, no-one had the time or desire to listen to the full interview.

The interviews took place in various places: the children's home, a playing field, under some trees, a mosque, my office, a participant's workplace, in parental homes. They lasted from one to two-and-a-half hours. Interviews were conducted in Bangla. Some young people needed a second interview, if the first contained too many distractions or if I required more detail. All interviews were conducted in places that were relatively quiet, to avoid possible distractions but where others could see us. Although most interviews were one-to-one, I did have to conduct two joint interviews: one from the NGO (the young people were close friends and believed that their experiences would be similar) and the other from the government girls' home (two sisters who wanted to be interviewed together).

The young people who were interviewed in my office were provided with refreshments. This was not on condition that they completed the interview, or to encourage their participation, but for cultural reasons. For those who were interviewed in the NGO home, refreshments were provided by the home. Interestingly, those young people who were interviewed in their own homes provided me with refreshments.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis**

There is no single best method for data analysis (Van Maanen 1988; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Research questions and the purpose of data collection determine the nature and depth of analysis (Silverman 2004). However, data analysis must not simply be the researcher's interpretation of events, but an account of what actually took place. While it was not necessary for my research to carry out detailed, line-by-line microanalysis of every piece of data, analysis must ensure that the mundane and

probably more representative data is not ignored in favour of the more exotic (Fielding and Fielding 1986).

I agree with Gallagher (2009) who argues that data analysis is an on-going process that should not be restricted, framed or left for the formal stage before writing. Therefore, although my principal focus during the fieldwork stage was on data collection, I started to analyse the data informally from the beginning (Burnard *et al.* 2008). During the early stage, I not only wrote in my fieldnotes descriptions of incidents, activities and conversations which I witnessed and was involved with but also wrote down my feelings and responses, and my conceptual understanding of the issues. I did not want to have too many themes, categories and groups since I hoped to further refine the themes that were coming up into tighter groups, so that I would be able to discuss, argue and analyse them more easily during the writing process. Questions that arose from initial fieldnote analysis fed into my observations and interviews questions greatly (see Emerson *et al.* 1995).

I began to systematically analyse data by transcribing interviews once I was back at university after completing my fieldwork. All interviews were first transcribed in Bangla and then I started to translate these transcripts in full into English. The transcribing was aggressively time-consuming, as Burgess *et al.* (1988) estimate that transcribing one hour's discussion takes ten or twelve hours; having to translate the interviews into English therefore doubled the time. I found the process of transcribing and translation at times tedious, tortuous (Dahlgren 1988) and frustrating, and in the end stopped translating after four interviews, and instead relied on the Bangla versions for the rest of my analysis, except where I wished to quote a person's speech directly. Transcribing, reading and re-reading interviews and fieldnotes helped me to piece together the different forms of data (audio-taped, transcribed interviews and fieldnotes) and re-familiarise myself with them, in order 'to develop a sense of the whole' (Alexiadou 2001:57).

I had planned to make use of data analysis software NVIVO to assist in the management, sorting, organising and retrieving of data, but NVIVO software was

unable to read Bangla – a fact that was previously unknown to me, my NVIVO tutor and even the software company. And so I had to code my data manually. It should be noted however that, while computer programmes can make life easier for researchers, ‘they do not confirm or deny the scientific value or quality of qualitative research, as they are merely instruments, as good or as bad as the researcher using them’ (Burnard *et al.* 2008:430); regardless of whether data is analysed manually or electronically, the process of analysis is essentially the same.

I began detailed analysis by working on three interview transcripts, one from each kind of institution (NGO, government and madrasah). I studied each transcript, tape and fieldnote with care to extract and capture the meaning of the text. While reading line-by-line the interviews and fieldnotes, I highlighted specific words, or made notes in the margins of words, theories or short-phrases. Emerson *et al.* (1995:143) refer to this as ‘open coding’, explaining that open coding ‘is a way of opening up avenues of inquiry . . . a way to name, distinguish and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations’ (Emerson *et al.* 1995:151). Delamont (1992:151) advises ‘coding your data *densely*: do not try to summarize them under just a few themes. Generate as many codes as you can; be ‘wild’ if you can’. Accepting this suggestion, I coded every single piece of data regardless of its importance and relevance to the subject that was being explored, knowing that I could organize my codes into categories and sub-categories at a later stage. I viewed my coding as a first step in the direction of systematic analysis and interpretation, believing, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, that codes represent a link between raw data and the researcher’s theoretical concepts. Table 4.1 is an example of how I did my initial open coding framework.

**Table 4.1: An Example of an Open Coding Framework**

Interview transcript	open coding framework
<p>‘Mohsin sir used to go to my school and meet my teachers to learn about my progress. He always talked to me about every visit. He would ask me about my studies and if I had any difficulties. He always emphasized the importance of education, saying ‘cultural activities are optional. If you study hard, you will progress’. He would congratulate me if my teachers gave positive feedback. If I was not doing well in school he would ask me to explain the reason why. He gave me advice on how to overcome difficulties. I felt good after talking to him and would try to do better in order to please him.’</p>	<p>Staff contact with school Guidance and support Young people’s relationship with staff Encouragement Community contact Positive impact of extra curricular activities Negative impact of cultural activities</p>
<p>‘My worst memory of the staff was when we used to study in the evenings. A few of us would study together and the teachers wouldn’t make themselves available to us. Those who lived on the premises remained in their rooms, doing their own thing. They didn’t care if we needed their help.’</p>	<p>Poor educational environment Staff negligence Lack of supervision and monitoring Lack of guidance Lack of relationship</p>

I compiled all of the open codes (words and phrases) from the interviews and removed all duplications to make a list of codes. From this list, I looked for any overlapping or similar categories, to create an ‘Analytic Index’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). I then refined and reduced these categories by grouping them together into similar patterns, looking for dominant themes, common threads, contrast and contradictions as well as silences. I also kept in mind at this stage the categories in the Department of Health *et al.*’s (2000) assessment framework. As discussed in Chapter Two, this highlights the importance of health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation and self-care skills on children’s development, as well as parental capacities and wider family and social factors. These categories were important to me but could not be expected to provide the whole picture for two reasons: firstly, because my focus was on leaving-care experiences and secondly, because my data had much more to say about some areas within this than others. By examining my own data in light of this, I was able to reduce my sub-categories significantly. Table 4.2 demonstrates how I did this.

**Table 4.2: An Example of Final Coding Framework after Reduction of the Categories in the Open Coding Framework**

<b>Initial coding framework</b>	<b>Final coding framework</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insecurity and Stigma</li> <li>• Guidance</li> <li>• Education and Career</li> <li>• Survival and Shelter</li> </ul>	Identity and Social Network
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff contact with school</li> <li>• Debriefing after each visit to school</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Poor educational environment</li> <li>• Lack of staff guidance</li> <li>• Lack of relationship</li> <li>• Extra curricular activities</li> <li>• Daily activities of the institution</li> <li>• Staff attitudes towards children</li> <li>• Management of the institutions</li> <li>• Rituals of the institution</li> <li>• Interests of an significant adult/guidance</li> <li>• Extra curricular activities</li> <li>• Educational facilities</li> <li>• Quiet study places</li> <li>• Importance of education</li> <li>• Available resources</li> <li>• Regimentation of institutions</li> </ul>	Educational Environment, Guidance and Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety and security</li> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Stigma</li> <li>• Community contact</li> <li>• Social network</li> <li>• Discrimination by society</li> <li>• Discrimination in the institution</li> <li>• Staff favouritism</li> </ul>	Effects of Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's aspiration</li> <li>• Children's self-confidence</li> <li>• Children's motivation</li> <li>• Children's commitment</li> <li>• Staff encouragement</li> </ul>	Aspiration, Self-motivation and Commitment

In the subsequent stage of analysis, I applied those reduced categories to the rest of the interviews and fieldnotes. During this phase, I had to up-date open code categories and sub-categories because of new data becoming available. I worked through each transcript, marking each category with its own colour or 'post-it' note. Finally all data, under each category and sub-category, were copied from the main

transcripts to create new files under different themes and categories. These files were then printed, divided into subjects in order to label each category and filed in a folder to create an organised data-set.

Strauss and Corbin (1998:12) state that grounded theories 'are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action'. Similarly, Taylor and Bogdan (1984:126) state that 'the grounded theory approach is a method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses and propositions directly from data, rather than from a priori assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks'. Elements of a grounded theory approach were applied to some extent in my research study to develop the categories and themes from a grass-roots level. However, Silverman (2004) argues that research questions and the purpose of data collection determine the nature and depth of analysis. Following this, I would argue that my own interest, beliefs and understanding, particularly concerning Bangladeshi residential institutional childcare and young people's preparation and leaving care experiences, influenced my theoretical understanding and research questions. They could not be easily separated out, since I brought them into the data collection and analysis. Thus, as Emerson *et al.* (1995:167) assert:

Theory only seems to jump out of the data and hit the researcher in the face; this flash of insight occurs only because of the researcher's prior analytic commitments built into the notes, the theoretical concerns and commitments she brings to the reading, and the connections made with other 'similar events' observed and written about.

This outlines well my own experience; that my understanding grew out of my experience, as well as out of the research itself. Burnard *et al.* (2008:430) state that interview transcripts, field notes and observations 'provide a descriptive account of the study, but they do not provide explanations. It is the researcher who has to make sense of the data that has been collected by exploring and interpreting them', which confirms the fact that the collection of qualitative data is itself a process of construction.

After analysing the data, I was able to identify four common themes:

1. Young people's educational experiences, including educational environment; staff guidance and support; and young people's aspiration, motivation and commitment;
2. Their healthcare experiences including: access to food medical care; health and life skills education; and illegal drugs and alcohol;
3. Their personal relationships, identity and social networks, including friendship; company and comfort; being cared for and supportive staff; and personal development, self-confidence and self-understanding; and
4. Their transition, leaving care and aftercare support experiences including insecurity and stigma; guidance; education and career development; and survival and shelter.

During the next stage, I re-checked my fieldnotes, compared different categories and themes with transcripts to identify contrasts, contradiction and silence. Finally, over a few months, I sought out literature on the identified themes. The literature guided me to see things in a different light. This caused me to revisit transcripts, quotes, themes and categories as well as fieldnotes and I began to 'contextualize my analysis within a broader analytical framework' (Wolcott 1994:34).

The process of analysis was highly iterative, time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, because I needed to ensure that the themes did not take away from the original data. However, this process gave me a feeling that I was closely connected with the field, data and young people. I could recall the context when I listened to the recordings and interviews. The most painstaking part of the analysis was writing and rewriting chapters for the thesis itself, until they were coherent. After writing Chapter Nine, I had to rewrite Chapters One and Three and so it went on. Becker (1986:55) writes, 'you usually find out, by the time you get to the end of your draft, what you have in mind. Your last paragraph reveals to you what the introduction ought to contain'. Finally, after much reviewing, I was able to draw conclusions.

#### **4.6. Reliability, Validity and Triangulation**

It has been argued that reliability and validity of research is heightened by good quality data collection, which may require the adoption of more than one method of data collection (a process known as 'triangulation'). Through this, data from one

method support another, helping researchers to compare and contrast outcomes and minimizing potential biases, thus ensuring more trustworthy results (Aptekar and Heinonen 2003; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Fielding and Fielding (1986) likewise assert that the role of triangulation is to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings. Scholars argue that looking at issues in different ways, and from several different angles, and points and perspectives provides a more comprehensive and accurate picture of that part of the social world being investigated (Graue and Walsh 1998; Luria 1979; Neuman 2000). Triangulation has been endorsed in both qualitative and quantitative social work research texts in order to enhance the quality of social work research (Grinnell and Unrau 2005; Neuman and Kreuger 2003; Padgett 1998; Rubin and Babbie 2005; Shaw and Gould 2002; Tutty *et al.* 1996).

Denzin (1989) describes four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theoretical and methodological.

- *Data triangulation* entails using many data sources across time, space, and social situation, as well as a variety of people.
- *Investigator triangulation* refers to the use of more than one researcher in the field to gather and interpret data.
- *Theoretical triangulation* refers to the use of more than one theoretical position in interpreting data.
- *Methodological triangulation* refers to the use of more than one method (such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observations) for gathering data.

I used both data and methodological triangulation to heighten the validity and reliability of my findings. The aims of the care institutions were generally the same, that is, preparing young people through education and other support-means so that they might grow up as educated, productive and good citizens. However, the modes of operation were very different. Using different settings and different research methods provided me with a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the young people's preparation and leaving care experiences, as well as showing me how the institutional systems, processes and practices influenced their experiences. I used multiple ways and sources to generate the data which either substantiated one finding

with the findings of others; complemented the findings with other findings, creating a more complete picture of the whole; or helped me to understand any divergences. The end-result is that while I have created what is, unavoidably, a personal account of young people's care-leaving experiences, it is nevertheless rigorous within its own parameters, that is, as a PhD research project.

#### **4.7. Ethical and Practical Issues**

Social research by its very nature raises important ethical considerations regarding obligations to society, colleagues and research participants. Studies of young people leaving residential care, and of their experiences inside and outside of homes, pose specific issues that need careful consideration (Alderson 2004) because of care-leavers' vulnerability in society (Kendrick *et al.* 2008). Information gathered in a study is also likely to be of a highly confidential and sensitive nature. Research in the most sensitive areas of social enquiry always poses logical, ethical, logistical and practical problems (Alderson 1995; Berridge and Brodie 1998; Lewis 2004; Morse 1994). Lee (1993) argues that investigations are particularly likely to have major complications for the researched and the researchers alike, in three situations: if they deal with private and stressful issues; when they study deviancy or social control; and where the emerging information may be stigmatising or incriminating in some ways. In addition, there are always likely to be issues of consent and confidentiality, safety and security of participants and researchers, the researcher's position as an insider/outsider, as well as other ethical concerns (Alderson 1995; Hermann 2001; Lee 1995; Pettigrew *et al.* 2004; Smyth and Robson 2001). My research concerned all these components and was highly sensitive, complex and challenging.

In order to identify potential risks and problems that might impact on the research, and find ways to overcome them (Hakim 1987), I considered the problems faced by previous researchers and how they dealt with them. This provided a strong foundation to the research design, and in particular practical and ethical issues, so as to avoid as many potential, anticipated problems in the field as possible (Blaikie 2000). The various ethical policies that I took account of for my study were:

- The School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Edinburgh's 'Research Ethics Policy and Procedures' (Appendix 5),

- The Centre for Children and Society, University of Glasgow's 'Code of Practice for Research Involving Children' (2006),
- The British Society of Criminology's Code of Ethical Practice (2006) guidelines,
- The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006), and
- The British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004).

Many of the recommendations outlined in the above policies proved impractical in my fieldwork because of cultural differences, traditional and religious beliefs and practices, the very different childcare systems, process and practices in Bangladesh, geographical location, and the political situation and nature of my particular research, as I will now discuss.

#### **4.7.1. Safety and Protection**

Ensuring safety and protection for the researcher and the participants is important when carrying out research, particularly in social science. However, it is impossible to predict all of the risks that one will encounter in the field, especially in times of political instability, when processions, blockades and assassinations are taking place. During the first five months of my fieldwork, I experienced many difficulties because Bangladesh was in political turmoil: transition of power, a military-backed caretaker government and the formal recognition of the Qaumi madrasah degree qualification.

In addition, arrests of religious extremist groups, an organised attack to close down the local brothel, and my involvement with an NGO, made carrying out fieldwork more complicated. At times, my life was threatened. These unanticipated and complicated situations slowed down my progress; the entire environment seemed to be against my plan, making me anxious and frustrated. I was forced to change, amend and even cancel my plans on a number of occasions, to avoid any potential risk to myself or my participants. Although political violence, turmoil and strikes are common forms of protest in Bangladesh, I will never forget what I experienced

during my fieldwork as a novice researcher. It was frightening. The political situation had a ripple effect throughout my fieldwork process.

#### **4.7.1.1. Political Difficulties**

From June to December 2006, the handover of power from the Bangladesh National Party (BNP)-led alliance to a caretaker government brought blockades, strikes and protests, culminating in violence, damage to public property and loss of life. Law and order broke down. Most schools, colleges and universities closed, and public transport came to a standstill. It became perilous to go outside and was a terrifying time for everyone. It was during this turmoil, in August 2006, that the BNP-led alliance government decided to recognise the Dawra degree of the Qaumi madrasah as equivalent to a Masters degree, just two months before their tenure ended. The Qaumi madrasahs had been demanding this recognition since the early 1980s. Feuding political parties accused the madrasahs of producing religious extremists. After the chief leader of the Jama'atu Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)<sup>5</sup> surrendered to the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)<sup>6</sup> during a siege operation, many madrasah students and teachers were suspected of being involved with the JMB. As a result, all strangers were treated with suspicion by madrasah students and teachers alike, because of fears of being arrested. They were therefore very cautious about making decisions or speaking on behalf of the madrasahs. This had a direct impact on my fieldwork.

In October 2006 the 'brothel eviction committee' organised an attempt to evict the residents of a brothel in my study area, condemning prostitution as a 'sin'. They held the view that the brothel was a den for miscreants, drug addicts and criminals. The eviction was met with a counter-rally, demanding that the brothel residents be allowed to remain. A riot ensued in which 14 people were injured. I witnessed this riot from the nearby library building and was terrified. Luckily the door of the library was locked and this gave me hope that no attacker could enter.

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<sup>5</sup>An underground Islamist extremist group

<sup>6</sup>the elite paramilitary force of Bangladesh.

Eventually, on the 11th January 2007, the army stepped in and forced the President to resign from the post of Chief Advisor. His board of advisors were also forced to resign, and a state of emergency was announced until further notice in order to crack down on the continuing violence. A new caretaker government was brought in and charged with holding free, fair and credible elections. During the state of emergency, the caretaker government arrested a number of senior leaders from all political parties, and prohibited any kind of public gatherings such as demonstrations, strikes, protest marches and processions. Public movement was restricted and human rights were curtailed.

#### **4.7.2. Access and Consent**

Gaining access to residential childcare institutions and young people was a highly complex, time-consuming and problematic process, as already discussed in the methodology section and outlined in Appendix 1 (see also Heptinstall 2000; Hayes 2005; Kendrick *et al.* 2008; McGee 1999).

#### **4.7.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality is important in any research. It is especially important in a study involving sensitive issues, such as in relation to residential childcare (Hill 2005; Kendrick *et al.* 2008). At the beginning of each interview, I assured participants that they would be given a pseudonym and that all information which they provided would only be used for academic purposes. I also made it clear that I would guarantee confidentiality, unless information divulged about young people put them at risk of serious harm or was deemed harmful for the organisation. However, I also explained to each participant that if a breach of confidentiality was considered necessary, this would be done with the young person's full knowledge (Alderson 1995; Butler and William 1996).

Interestingly, although anonymity was granted to participants (Hill 2005), the majority of male participants from the government institutions and all participants from the madrasah wanted their real names to be used in the report and they wanted the higher authorities to know what they had said. On the other hand, all NGO participants and female participants from the government institution warned me not

to disclose their identity to others. Considering all this, I decided to use pseudonyms for those who did not want to be identified.

#### **4.7.4. Incentives as Compensation**

Originally I had planned to provide incentives (cash, refreshments/lunch) to compensate participants for their time. I also hoped that incentives would encourage and motivate their full involvement and cooperation in the study (Ward 1997). It is also a cultural norm in Bangladesh to offer refreshments when people meet with a purpose. If they had attended a workshop or conference they would have been offered cash, or in-kind incentives, for their participation. In addition, there is a general belief among native Bangladeshis, that those who have migrated abroad for whatever reason earn vast amounts of money. I was in a dilemma. Should I give them cash incentives even though my financial situation did not allow me to do so? Some researchers have argued that the issue of incentives can be seen as ‘bribery for participation’, however, others have said that cash incentives can be seen as compensation and thus respecting cultural implications, norms and practices (Hill 2005:71). Keeping these ethical issues and their implications in mind, along with my financial situation and cultural norms, I decided not to provide informants with financial incentives. Rather I offered them refreshments, respecting Bangladeshi customs and norms to see how the young people reacted. These were provided once the interviews were completed. Interestingly, those who were interviewed in their parental homes or at their workplaces offered me refreshments. I could not refuse their hospitality and I believe that I made the right decision to accept their hospitality by respecting the culture.

#### **4.7.5. Insider Status**

Returning to Bangladesh and the organisation I worked for prior to starting my PhD to carry out fieldwork posed some dilemmas. Returning to familiarities of locality is not necessarily like returning home, as there are distinctions between ‘field’ and ‘home’, which can be problematic (Sultana 2007). I was born and brought up in this country, knew its cultures, values, social and political situations. More specifically I had knowledge of the fieldwork area, knew the NGO scene and a few potential interviewees. Here I was a ‘native’. In contrast, I did not know the people of the

government institutions or the madrasahs, of their daily activities, their interactions with the communities or the young people who had left those institutions. Thus in this situation I was both an 'insider' and 'outsider' and for this reason, I constantly needed to rework my status as my fieldwork progressed.

Researchers describe 'insider research' as contributing greatly to the practice of organisations and individuals who work within them (Adlem 1998; Kanuha 2000; Kacen and Chaitin 2006). Thus, I expected my interpretation and analysis of data gathered to be more sensitive and critical than that of an 'outsider'. However, for an insider there may be several sources of potential bias from the point of view of data collection, interpretation and analysis, which may have direct implications on the findings (Chavez 2008). My professional values and ethics, and my 'Western' training meant that I now viewed young people as a 'vulnerable' group within society. Additionally, I had to be conscious that I did not give special preference to the NGO home, due to my previous association with it. Of course, my knowledge of the local situation and the way in which I observed and interpreted behaviour would have been very different from the perceptions and views of local people. I was constantly aware of my role as a researcher and took great care to ensure that full value and recognition was given to all participants' views, including those that went against my own personal belief system. There were, however, other risks that I will now describe.

#### **4.7.5.1. Brothel Dangers**

During the state of emergency, the RAB and police frequently raided the local brothel, causing me much distress. I never knew when they would raid, or when it was safe to visit the area. I had witnessed many police raids when I worked with sex workers in the brothel prior to starting my PhD, and knew it was a most distressing situation for the sexworkers, clients, children and visitors. I also knew that the Police and RAB could arrest me or my participants with impunity.

In addition, my former involvement with an NGO home posed further risks. When I was Head of Programme, the children's mothers were forbidden to take their children to the brothel; instead they would be invited to celebrate festivals with their children

in the care home. They were also not allowed to bring their 'Babu' (permanent client) inside the children's home. Most mothers understood the reason for this, even though they were not happy about it. In addition, brothel mafia, pimps, hooligans and human traffickers were resentful of our work, particularly with regards to the protection of the children of sex workers. The mafia controlled the brothels, and crime was perpetrated by brothel youth under their direction. Sex workers and their children were bound to follow orders or risk punishment. Many deaths resulted from power clashes within the brothel. Sex workers and their children were not permitted to leave the brothel without permission from the mafia. If these children had not been rescued from the brothel, many of the female children would have been brought into the sex trade, and the boys would have been forced to become gangsters. The brothel mafia found the NGO's activity a threat to their livelihood.

During my time as Head of Programme, the NGO started a project for the brothel youth targeting those who had left NGO home; 'Youth Development Program for Brothel Children', with the aim of rehabilitating them through trade-based skills development. They were offered skills training, drug and HIV awareness education, anti-trafficking awareness, moral education and 'hope and aspiration' therapy. Initially thirty young men signed up, but the number suddenly dropped. On investigation it was discovered that many of these boys had been tortured for attending the programme, despite talks with the criminal gang leaders prior to the start of the project to get their 'blessing'. This example made me afraid of getting young people involved in my study.

I had the fear that brothel mafia, or unhappy mothers, would attack or make false allegations against me. Nevertheless, I tried to maintain contact with the mothers, and they eventually became my supporters. I cross-checked the information they gave me about the situation in the brothel with that of my former colleagues who still worked there, and always ensured that one of these colleagues accompanied me on visits. A few times angry mothers had shouted obscenities at me or made complaints against the NGO home. Drunken mafia had threatened me in the past. I knew also that the police would not take kindly to my being in the brothel area and would ask

what I was doing there, another reason to be accompanied by a colleague. Eventually, without major difficulties, I was able to resume my research and involve young people from the brothel area in my fieldwork.

#### **4.7.5.2. Fears of Extremism**

Some extremist groups have an aversion to NGOs. Such groups consider NGOs as working against religion, and claim that NGO activities encourage people towards secularism. My background as an NGO professional could therefore make them react negatively to me, something I sensed during my initial visits to several madrasahs. I felt that they suspected me of being a spy, or of working for a law enforcement agency. On a few occasions, especially in the evening, some people asked me for my identity card and questioned me on the work I was doing. They asked the reasoning behind such research at a time when madrasah students and staff were under surveillance by the RAB. I was not sure whether they were involved with extremist groups, but I did feel threatened by their challenging remarks.

#### **4.7.5.3. Personal Response**

Due to political instability, my research generated suspicion amongst the police and others. I was under the surveillance of the police, RAB, madrasah staff, perhaps also extremist groups and the brothel mafia. The extremists saw me as an ‘outsider’ and thus a threat to them. The police considered me an ‘insider’ and suspected me of being an extremist. I was under surveillance from both sides. Terrorist groups watched my activities and considered me their enemy. I was stopped and charged several times by the RAB and police, during the late evenings, coming from the home, government institutions or madrasah. Both would search my bag, question me aggressively and treat me like a criminal. My past status in the area, personal contacts (I have friends and family members working in the civil service and law enforcement agency), my work and university ID and letters from the institutions, all helped to overcome these threats. On occasions, the police threatened me with arrest, but realising that the underlying reason for such threats was bribery, I informed them that I was a journalist and that I had links with the president of the Press Club. Corrupt police are often afraid of journalists.

The exploratory nature of my study required me to visit the brothel area, NGO home, madrasah and the government institutions to get young people involved in my research, so that I could observe their situation and understand their views. My years of experience working in difficult environs such as brothels, and in conflict situations such as that between my secular NGO and religious groups, helped me to overcome difficulties in order to complete the task. I developed strategies to tackle difficult situations to gain access to the people and places I needed access to. These included: not sharing my visit plans with others unless necessary; avoiding using the same route to reach target areas; cross-checking given information and consulting with trusted colleagues; being prepared to explain my research aims and activities in layman terms; being an active listener and being precise when speaking; accessing news updates regularly; being careful and sensitive to all potential hazards; and finally, remaining calm and using 'common-sense' to tackle difficult situations.

Other practical issues such as the various institutions' unspoken rules, and the madrasah dress-code, young people's present circumstances, and Bangladesh's natural and political calamities were taken into consideration and dealt with sensitively and flexibly.

#### **4.7.6. Power**

The power imbalance between an adult researcher and young participants cannot be ignored in research. Adults often believe that they know better than children (Punch 2002) and have power and influence over them in any situation and environment (Mayall 2000) In Bangladesh, adults often make decisions on their behalf, in an 'adultist' way; children are taught to respect adults by not disagreeing with them in any way. From personal experience, this is prevalent in residential childcare.

I was aware that some young people from the NGO home might feel awkward or uncomfortable answering my research questions, and could have reservations about me because of my prior role as Assistant Director, and thus might not be completely honest in talking about their experiences. Those who were receiving aftercare support at the time might have felt it necessary to withhold information due to a sense of loyalty towards the organisation. They may also have been afraid that I

would inform the principal and the Executive Director about their views, even though I had assured them of confidentiality. Keeping all this in mind, I tried to help them overcome their fears by developing trusting relationships with them from the start, and by taking care not to exercise my power or control over them (Greig and Taylor 1999). I think that I was successful in this, as demonstrated by the fact that some young people asked me challenging questions about my study while others declined to take part after questioning me. During these challenges, I remained diplomatic or tried to humour the young people, depending on the individual's mood and circumstances (see Sultana 2007).

Gatekeepers also exercised power throughout the process, as I have discussed at various points throughout the chapter.

#### **4.8. Looking Back: Reflections of Fieldwork Experiences**

Carrying out the research was difficult. Political uncertainty, a volatile field, ensuring safety and security of researcher and participants, as well as other customary ethical and practical issues made the whole project an adventure and very complex. Conventional research methods and discussions of ethics in fieldwork at times felt insufficient, irrelevant or ineffective because of what Sultana has described as 'critical disjunctures between aspects of everyday behaviour in the field and the university's institutional frameworks that aim to guide/enforce good ethical practice, as the conduct of fieldwork is always contextual, relational, embodied, and politicized' (Sultana 2007:374).

As discussed, gaining access to young people through their gatekeepers was especially arduous. My main challenges were the transition of political power and the violence associated with it during the fieldwork time, the activities of religious extremists, social discrimination of sexworkers and their children, my own professional identity involvement in addition to participants' naivety of the research process. Winning the trust of individuals was difficult. I was perplexed as to where to start my data collection because of the changing political situation.

My personal contacts helped me to approach the Director General of the Social Welfare but this was at huge risk to my personal safety. I had to go to the capital city, Dhaka (100 miles from my research site) on several occasions to meet with him. He cancelled several of my appointments due to urgent calls from the Ministry. I realized that the support of his junior colleagues was also necessary, yet most of the other staff seemed to have negative views of young people residing in care institutions. The local Assistant Director's approval paved the way for me to reach my target group; however, my personal contacts and the relationships developed with key individuals helped me complete the task.

It should be understood that government institutes in Bangladesh re-affirm the traditional patriarchal society. Thus it was the Assistant Director who approved my application and not the Deputy Director (his wife), although on the whole I found the female staff much more supportive than their male colleagues in providing me with information and useful suggestions and more welcoming generally than their male colleagues. At one stage, the deputy superintendent of the government girls' institution referred to me as 'her brother' which certainly made things easier for me.

I reached many more young people using 'snowballing' methods than I had expected. However, the number of young people evicted from the government and NGO institutions was quite high. This point will be picked up in the findings chapters.

My former involvement with the NGO had a direct impact on access to the government institutions and the madrasah. In Bangladesh, public sector jobs are generally held in high regard. I felt that at times I was treated as a 'second-class citizen' because of my attachment to an NGO. The madrasah staff, on the other hand, generally had little interest in my research issues. With their suspicious and pragmatic mindset, and the political situation, my style of dress, trimmed beard and above all my attachment to an NGO all made them feel uncomfortable. They believed that NGOs worked against Islam, but were unable to explain why they believed this. The unstable political situation accelerated their fears and suspicions. I

had to work hard to win over their trust, and adopted different strategies to do this including changing my style of dress, growing my beard longer and spending a lot of time with them.

Many situations arose during my fieldwork that challenged standard ethical research practice. So, for example, keeping the emotional boundary of researcher and my role as a development activist and human being separate was not always possible. Though my role as researcher was to collect information from the field and not get involved emotionally, I found myself intervening on a number of occasions because I could not allow the injustice of a situation to continue. The discovery that staff had been physically abusing children, or had been stealing money from the children's food and maintenance budget, were examples where I felt I had to intervene. I either did so directly or spoke to the institution's higher authorities. On a number of occasions these higher authorities were shocked at learning that such practices were taking place. They promised to investigate and take necessary action. Some thanked me for bringing the matter to their attention, while in other cases they tried to justify the practices.

When young people asked me what benefit the research would have for them, I found it difficult to provide them with an unbiased, impartial and ethical answer. I tried to be completely honest with them, not wanting to raise their hopes and expectations, in order that I could achieve my objective. I said that they would probably not benefit individually. However, I explained that when I returned to Bangladesh after completing my PhD, I would try and put pressure on the government to develop a national residential childcare policy, either through my journalism, or by campaigning with other like-minded individuals and organisations for the benefit of children in care. If this were to happen, it would be a great achievement on a broad scale, benefiting all young people needing residential support in the future. The majority of answers given by young people who had been evicted from homes were aggressive and negative compared to their peers who had left care after graduating or through reintegration. The evicted youngsters wanted me to understand that they had been evicted to satisfy the vested interests of staff and

that this had ruined their lives. Most of them wanted me to let the respective authorities know their views and opinions of care, in order to make changes to existing systems and practices.

Looking back over my fieldwork notes, it seems to me that working in a challenging and risky environment creates many different feelings once the task is completed. The highly complex field and sensitive topic has taught me much by challenging my beliefs and presumptions, and has posed questions on the validity of traditional research methods and ethics. I was happy in the end to have been able to gather the rich data that I needed to complete my thesis by tackling suspicions, threats and barriers.

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the research process from planning to practice. Following theoretical and methodological issues, I have presented the stepwise approach adopted to gain access to the institutions and their young people. The challenges that I faced and how my personal contacts influenced and sped up the process are outlined. I have talked about the challenges of ethical issues encountered and how the country's political situation, the institutions' internal politics and practices influenced me in redefining my identity as a researcher and changed, amended and cancelled my work schedules and accessibility. Reflecting back on fieldwork experiences, I have explored in detail my own experience as an 'insider' researching a sensitive topic and the impact this had on participants, on the data and on myself. The following chapter provides an insight into the four residential childcare institutions where the young people who took part in the study grew up, their daily routines and their contact with their families and the outside world.

# The Research Context: Young People and their Institutional and Social Background

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the young people who participated in the study, then describes the institutions selected for study (their physical structures; daily routines, rituals and rhythms; contact with children's families and involvement with the community) to help understand the residential experience.

## 5.2. Young People Interviewed for this Study

### Admission Criteria

Only children of sex workers were admitted into the NGO home. Generally it was the NGO social workers working with the brothel community that arranged the admissions. Two out of the 12 participants believed that the person they called 'baba'/'abba'<sup>7</sup> was their real father. The other participants did not refer to having a father figure. Since paternity was such a sensitive issue, I refrained from asking any questions directly about it, and instead gained information from the home's records about this.

The government homes were established primarily to provide for the care of those who were designated as 'orphans' (that is, those whose father had either died or abandoned them). Three out of the 10 participants said that their fathers were deceased. Another three said that their fathers had abandoned them when their parents had divorced. The remainder said that they still had both parents.

The madrasah, in contrast, took children from any background. Five had lost their father through death.

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<sup>7</sup> Bangla word for 'father'

This small sample accords with Hoque's (1991) finding that 85 per cent of children in Bangladeshi orphanages have mothers who are alive. The institutions were their legal guardian, but children did have regular contact with their family and kinsfolk.

### **Reasons for Admissions to Institutions**

All the children from the NGO home said that their mothers had sent them to the home for education, safe accommodation, and/or protection from abuse. They also mentioned wanting to 'become someone', that is, to be accepted by wider mainstream society. In contrast, those from the government institutions gave a variety of reasons for admission: poverty, siblings being in the institution, education, safety and protection (girls) and for a better future. Children from the madrasah said that their parents had enrolled them for religious educational purposes. A few children also mentioned poverty, mothers finding them difficult, playing truant at school. Nevertheless, the themes for admission, as stated by participants were education, accommodation, food, safety and protection.

### **Gender and Age**

Of the 33 young people who were interviewed, 23 were male and 10 female (Table 5.1). The NGO home was of mixed gender, the government institutions had separate facilities for males and females and the madrasah catered only for males. Most of the interviewees were aged 16 years and over. The youngest (13 years) and oldest (26 years) were from the madrasah. The youngest and oldest interviewees from the NGO were aged 14 and 21 respectively, while in the government institutions they were aged between 18 and 23 (Table 5.1). It must be stated, however, that the ages given by interviewees may not be their actual age since none could state their date of birth. The compulsory registration of births in Bangladesh is a fairly recent phenomenon. I was not permitted access to government or madrasah records on residents.

**Table 5.1: Young People's Age and Gender**

Institution	Age and Gender										Total
	13-15		16-18		19-21		22-24		25-26		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
NGO	1		4	2	2	3					<b>12</b>
Government				2	5	1	1	1			<b>10</b>
Madrasah	1		2		4		1		3		<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33</b>

**Time in Care**

The majority of young people had lived in their institution for seven years or more (Table 5.2). Nearly a sixth had been in care for over ten years, over a third had spent between seven and ten years and just under a third had spent four to six years in care. Only two had spent less than four years in care. Those who had spent four to six years in care were mainly from the NGO, while those who had spent over ten years were from the madrasah and the government institutions.

**Table 5.2: Young People's time Spent in Care**

Institutions	Years				Total
	2-3	4-6	7-10	>10	
NGO	1	7	4	0	12
Government	0	0	8	2	10
Madrasah	1	3	4	3	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>33</b>

**5.3. Physical Environment of the Institutions**

When we talk about the physical environment of Bangladeshi childcare institutions, the picture that comes to mind is often one of a tall walled or fenced building, covering a large plot of land, with a semi-pukka (low cost mud-covered floor) building made with corrugated iron sheets, containing a sleeping area, kitchen, toilet facilities, playing field, pond and school. Of course, not all residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh look the same. Their buildings, grounds, facilities, structure and enclosing fence are very different. Such differences are heavily influenced by the availability of funds and the values, religious beliefs and cultural practices of the people in management. No doubt, the structure and environment would have influenced young people's care experience and had an impact on their lives once they left care.

## **NGO home**

The NGO home selected for this study was located in a village 10 kilometres from the centre of the nearest city. Rickshaw and tempoo<sup>8</sup> were the only modes of transport which could be used to get there. The home had a high boundary wall made of corrugated iron sheets. The main entrance was kept locked and the security guard would only open the door when permission was given by the principal or teachers.

Each day many visitors came to the home and a Visitors' Book was available for comments. Often the comments were positive, praising staff for the challenging work they were doing, their dedication and commitment, and the home's overall hospitality.

There was a large U-shaped corrugated iron shed semi-pukka building which surrounded a beautiful flower garden and open space. This building was the hostel for 44 boys, male teachers' accommodation and the administration office. Behind this building there was a large playing field and a newly-built two-storey building that housed the 56 girls. There were five acres of land which were used for growing vegetables and rice, poultry farming, dairy and fish farming. Most of the produce was consumed by the residential children.

The ground floor of the girls' building was used as a primary school where children from the community could also study, up to 'grade five'. It contained a large multi-purpose auditorium used as a TV room, a venue for cultural programmes, a meeting/training room and also as a quiet/study room.

The kitchen and dining area were extensions of the girls' hostel. There were adequate numbers of tables and chairs in the dining room, and plenty of cooking utensils. Kitchen staff catered for around 130 people each mealtime, including 30 staff. Children had free access to the kitchen. The scullery was used to store things needed for the day's cooking. The home could afford a refrigerator and freezer and there were large cabinets in which cooked food was kept away from cats and flies. There

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<sup>8</sup> A local three-wheeled vehicle.

was a generator next to the kitchen which started up automatically if the electricity supply was cut off. This was a sign of luxury provided to the residents.

Girls and female teachers slept on the second floor. Each room contained four beds, four desks with chairs, a bookshelf and one common alna (dress-stand). The bookshelf was used to store toiletries and snacks as well as books. Each room had a balcony, which was used for drying clothes, storage and relaxing. Each girl had her own steel trunk under her bed, in which she stored her personal items. The rooms were clean and tidy, and the doors and windows had curtains for privacy. At the end of each corridor were four toilets and four washrooms. A cleaner cleaned the toilets daily, indicating the importance of hygiene in the institution. The girls would also help out with cleaning. Children shared rooms with those of a similar age. Some shared with siblings or could even choose their roommates. Female teachers had separate rooms situated in the corners of the building so that they could oversee the children.

The boys' bedrooms were similar to those of the girls, except that they were less tidy. Their rooms were decorated with posters of famous cricket or football personalities, natural scenery or animals. They had sports equipment, especially cricket gear, stored in their rooms. This showed that they were allowed private possessions, and that they had hobbies and interests like other children. Like the female staff, male teachers slept on the same floor as students.

The main office had a visitors' room attached, which was available to mothers when they came to visit their children. The Principal and his accountant shared the main office. They had separate desks and there was a large table shared by all of the teachers. Each teacher had their own locker. There was a big display case full of books, award certificates, medals and trophies. There was also an information board giving details about the children's home (daily activities, the number and age of children, students' achievements, community activities and other related issues). This indicated that the management knew and cared about the children's activities and achievements.

### **Government Shishu Paribar (Girls)**

The girls' institution was situated in the town centre and was surrounded by high protective walls. The main gate was kept locked with a guard checking all those entering and leaving, similar to the NGO.

The ground floor of the residence building was open-plan. This open space was multi-purpose; a classroom, indoor play area and workshop/meeting area. The children's bedrooms were on floors one to three. Four to seven girls shared each bedroom. One hundred girls lived here. Younger children often shared a bed, while older ones had their own. The distribution of beds was dependent on the children's age, study pressures and relationship with others. It was not unusual for children of different ages to share a room or for siblings to share rooms like in the NGO home.

The rooms were generally tidy and clean. Books, toiletries and mirrors were kept on window ledges. Unlike the NGO, there were no curtains on the windows to provide privacy, even though the institution was situated next to a public bus station.

The four residential staff were all female. The children called them 'Khala Amma'<sup>9</sup>. The Khala Ammas had their own separate rooms that they shared between two. Children were denied access to these rooms, indicating the separation between staff and children. The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent also lived on the premises and had their own separate building.

There were toilets and bathrooms on every floor, which the children had to keep clean themselves, so they were not very clean. Light bulbs were often not replaced. 'Khala Ammas' had separate bathrooms, which they kept immaculate.

Children cooked for themselves in 'family' groups in an inadequately lit kitchen. The kitchen/dining room was unappealing, so children preferred to eat in their bedrooms. The Khala Ammas tended to be absent while children prepared and ate their meals, unless they wanted to join those who had prepared tasty food.

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<sup>9</sup> Literally meaning 'mother's sister'

The dining room was also used as the TV room, which came on when staff wished. Children could make requests but everything depended upon the mood of the staff. Staff maintained control by using a collapsible gate on the first floor that could be locked whenever they wanted to curtail children's movements. Locking up and denying access were common practices in establishing and maintaining control and discipline.

The superintendent's office was beautifully furnished. The deputy had to share a room with the secretarial staff. The staff room gave the impression of a bureaucratic institution rather than a home for children. The difference between the superintendent's and deputy's room showed the power dynamics between them.

### **Government Shishu Paribar (Boys)**

The boys' institution was situated a kilometre from the city centre. Like the girls' institution, it was surrounded by a tall wall. A notice stated; 'This is public property. Entry is restricted. No one is allowed to enter the Shishu Paribar for the collection of drinking water or firewood, taking a bath in the pond, fishing, grazing cows, or any other purpose, without prior permission'.

The campus was large, and very green and clean. The office and children's quarters for 150 boys were in the same building. There were separate staff quarters, a mosque and a large playing field. The property was old and badly in need of refurbishment.

The superintendent had his own furnished room with his official title on the door. His door and windows were curtained, providing privacy and showing his power and responsibility. Like the girls' institution, the deputy shared her room with other staff, including the compounder (a person similar to a nurse).

The kitchen, toilets and dining room could be accessed from the entrance lobby. The toilets were on the way to the kitchen and dining room. The bathrooms in the children's residence were unhygienic. The kitchen and dining room were dark and dirty. The children's bedrooms contained two to five beds and younger children slept in pairs.

## **Madrasah**

The madrasah was situated in quite a busy area, fairly near to the city centre. It had two sections; the Hifz-Khana, where the Qur'an was memorized, and the Qaumi madrasah where orthodox Islamic lessons were given.

The institute was set out in a square. In the middle there was a large open space used as a playing field and for prayers during festival times. The Hifz-Khana was situated in a large, beautiful three-storey mosque on the west side of the complex.

The first floor of the Hifz-Khana had three rooms. The first room was occupied by two graduate students, although it contained nothing but two wooden beds and a table. The second room was huge and occupied two thirds of the building. This room was used for sleeping, study, eating and playing. 200 children slept on the floor in rows. Some children had thin mattresses, which they used in winter. Everybody had their own pillow and duvet or khantah (thin blanket). Children kept their personal belongings in small steel trunks. In the morning, they rolled up their bedding and stored it against the wall. One teacher slept in this room with the children but he had a low, wooden bed with a proper mattress indicating some level of separation between him and the children. During lessons, children sat on the floor while the teacher sat on his bed. This again reflects the status differentiation, although this was to do with respect as well as power difference.

The Qaumi madrasah was a tin shed mud-floored building housing 400 children in many similar-sized rooms. Students from the same class shared rooms. Like in the Hifz-Khana, the rooms were multi-purpose. After memorizing the Quran, many Hifz-Khana pupils were admitted into the Qaumi madrasah for further studies.

The kitchen was small and very different from the NGO and government institutions. It was separated from the large room. There was no furniture there so children sat on the floor to eat.

There was no bathroom and children bathed together in the outdoor water reservoir, using jugs to pour water over themselves. There were only seven toilets for over 200 children and the conditions were unhygienic.

The Hifz-Khana office was rarely used. It was small and contained a small table, two large wooden cabinets and a single low-lying bed. The door was always open and there was no curtain on it. The Qaumi madrasah office was large with no door or windows; a shutter was used to close it off. There was a large bookcase, full of books, and a large antique steel cabinet. The Muhaddis (head of the madrasah) used the bed as a seat.

The NGO and government institution's high walls and other physical structures share some similarities with Goffman's 'total institution' (Goffman 1961). However, I saw no evidence of dehumanising treatment as described by Goffman. Contemporary residential childcare institutions would see Goffman's description as gross abuse and neglect; childcare institutions in Bangladesh require such boundaries for protection and safety. The physical environment of the institutions is dependent on funds available. Since the NGO had access to overseas donations, they could afford to employ cleaners and kitchen staff, making life easier for the children and providing hygienic conditions. The government institutions and madrasah had no such support thus their conditions were more basic, with basic levels of hygiene.

#### **5.4. Routines and Rhythms of the Day: A Typical Day of the Children's Institution**

Each institution has its own activities, rules and rituals, but with a number of similarities. During my fieldwork, I experienced many humorous and bizarre incidents. Some made me laugh; others gave me hope and inspiration for better childcare practice in the future. There were also incidents that caused me great pain, when certain systems and practices completely violated the rights of those children in care preventing them from realizing their full potential. I observed the NGO and government institutions having a series of structured activities to keep children occupied. The madrasah, on the other hand, was flexible in everything except education. In this section I outline a typical day in each institution. It should be noted

that all institutions were residential for the children, but not necessarily for the staff. The residential staff worked a 24-hour day with no shift changes as in 'Western' institutions.

### **NGO home**

The day began with the night guard waking the staff at around 4:30am (summertime) and 5:30am (wintertime). The teachers would then get the children ready for Fajr (morning) prayer, as everyone in the home was at least nominally Muslim. Boys prayed in the mosque and girls in the compound prayer room, both accompanied by staff. After prayers, everyone would read the Qur'an for an hour.

While children were in the mosque reading the Qur'an, the catering staff prepared breakfast, teaching staff prepared their lessons and cleaners started their work. The Principal would hurry the kitchen staff because it was essential to get children to school on time.

Once the Qur'an class was over the children got themselves ready for lessons before breakfast at 8am. Breakfast was light-hearted with children, teachers and staff all joking with each other. One student would say 'you are a cow how do you know the taste of cooked food,' another might say, 'you are a cockroach, everything is tasty to you, you need to check your tongue to see whether it is working properly or not'. Teachers and other staff ate with the children and joined in with the banter. If any of the children were sick, the staff made sure they were catered for. All of this indicated a comfortable family-like environment with love, care and a level of equality among and between children and staff.

Primary school lessons began at 9am, after an Assembly. For older children classes started at 11am. When high school children were ready for school they congregated in front of the main entrance to register their names before leaving. With much protestation from the children, a teacher or guard would accompany them to school to stop any truanting, protect girls from local wayward lads and prevent any misbehaviour.

Primary school finished between 11:30am and 12noon. Children could do as they pleased before prayer time at 1:10 pm but were expected to take a shower before prayers. Older children or staff helped younger children to shower. After prayers, children would go for lunch with their teachers.

After lunch, the high school children returned to class and the primary school children had free time. They were allowed to hang around in the fruit garden and or sit in their friends' rooms. Staff would ask them to take a nap, especially during the summer or monsoon seasons. At 4:00pm one member of staff would go to school to bring the high school children back at the end of the school day. On route children would ask staff various questions, in particular if their mothers had phoned. After a second lunch, the children had free time. Some would go for singing and dancing lessons, but not everybody had this opportunity. The teachers decided which pupils they had in their class. All children had to do martial arts in order to learn self-defence. Children who were good in lessons tended to be good also at extra-curricular activities. This meant that they found it difficult to find time to practise everything along with their studies.

Children who had committed a misdemeanour were seen by the principal after lunch. Often they would receive a verbal warning. If the poor behaviour persisted they would be threatened with eviction from the home. Corporal punishment was not common practice and only used as a last resort.

After Asr (afternoon) prayer, most boys and younger girls would take part in outdoor games. Cricket, football and volleyball were popular with boys, while badminton, cram board and skipping were popular with girls. Younger children tended to run around while older girls walked around the grounds with friends or watched the boys play. Male teachers also joined in with games. Some children used this time to get extra tuition from private tutors.

Some adolescent girls would stay in their rooms or go onto the balcony to attract the attention of young men walking past the boundary walls attached to the girls' hostel.

Some girls secretly passed 'love letters' to their 'fancy man' through balcony windows. They knew they would be punished if the teachers or the principal found out.

Children were given a snack between afternoon and Magrib (sunset) prayers. After Magrib prayer children would do their homework. The teachers would help children and give extra lessons. Each subject had a different teacher. Teachers were very strict during this time, ensuring that all children were on task and focused. Teachers would ask children to recite or write their lessons, to check that they were complete. It was very much a relationship of care and control between staff and children.

The evening meal started after Isha (night) prayer at 8:30pm and was finished by 9pm, after which children could watch TV or go to their rooms. Teachers controlled the remote control, yet took votes on which channel to watch. This indicated an awareness of children's wishes and desires.

Bedtime was 9:30pm for the younger children. Older children were encouraged to continue their personal study until 11pm before retiring. Teachers retired at this time too. Getting the children into bed was as difficult as getting them up in the morning. Lights went out at 11pm and the home would become quiet.

The children's home regularly entertained visitors. Usually a cultural programme would be put on if the visitors were from a donor agency or were high government officials. The programmes usually lasted an hour or two. However, preparation for such events took many hours. Sometimes children had to miss school and other routine activities to practise. Such programmes were often damaging to the children's schooling because of time lost from class.

All in all, it was a long day for staff. Teachers would say 'this is a 24-hour job, very stressful, demanding and challenging, yet we enjoy it. Nobody can understand the intensity of working with 100+ children with different needs, demands and priorities'.

### **Government institutions**

Like the NGO home, the government institutions' daily activities began at around 4:30am (summertime) and 5:30am (wintertime) with Fajr prayer. Activities tended to be unmonitored on most days. After Fajr prayer, children would clean their rooms before doing half an hour of physical exercise. They would then go to their rooms to study except those who were on cooking rota, who went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for their 'family'. Breakfast finished by 8:30am.

After breakfast, children got ready for school or training. Children between grades one and three went to lessons in the institutions starting at 10am. Older children studied in the community school. They went in groups without adult accompaniment. Staff arrived between 9:30 and 10am. Children on the cooking rota could not attend school because they were needed to receive food deliveries and prepare the day's meal for their 'family'.

Children intending to play truant hid themselves from staff so no questions were asked. Yet most of the time staff did not care about chasing up truants, unless the child was caught. In these cases, if staff were not satisfied with the explanations given, truants were threatened with eviction and sometimes beaten.

The institution's school would finish at noon. Children would hang around, play or do chores until Zohr prayer. Staff and children from the boys' institution would attend prayers in the mosque.

Lunch was served between 1:15 and 2pm. Usually, children who were in the community school would come back for lunch. Lunch would be eaten in either their own room or in a friend's room. After lunch, younger children would be expected to take a nap while others returned to school. All children were back from school by Asr prayers at around 5pm. After prayers, children played outdoors games. Cricket, badminton, football and volleyball were common for boys, while girls played kutkut<sup>10</sup>, dariabandha<sup>11</sup>, cram board and ludo. There was enough space to play but

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<sup>10</sup> 'Kutkut' is a type of hopscotch.

they seriously lacked sports equipment. Children had to buy or make their own equipment. Some children hung around in small groups or worked in the vegetable and flower gardens. One member of staff would monitor the children while outdoors but did not interact with them.

Outdoor games would finish 15 minutes before Magrib prayer. After prayer, children studied until dinnertime and Isa prayer at 8:30pm. Academic children continued studying after dinner while others watched TV (if it was working) or sat with friends. Staff were less controlling than in the NGO because they did not check on children, but they did make their presence felt by walking up and down corridors. Most children were in bed by 11 pm.

### **Madrasah**

The day started very early for children in the madrasah. Lessons began at 3am in the Hifz-Khana and 4:30am in the Qaumi section. Breakfast was not served until 8am. After breakfast, Hifz-Khana children were free until Zohr prayer, so they bathed or carried out chores. Qaumi children had classes from 9:00am until noon. Then they were free until Zohr prayer, after which lunch was served.

After lunch, classes began again until Asr prayer. Unlike in the government institutions, truancy was not tolerated. Only illness gave them permission to miss class. Staff ensured regular attendance and the completion of lessons.

After Asr prayer, children were free. Younger children played games and others went out for private tuition, shopping or to visit relatives. They used sticks for wickets and wooden planks for bats. Many children played wearing their full Islamic dress.

Lessons began again with Magrib prayer until Isha prayer, after which dinner was served, then bedtime at 9pm.

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<sup>11</sup> Dariabadha is like Tag.

The madrasah day was regulated by prayer times much more than the other institutions yet it was still more flexible. Islamic education was the mainstay. Staff expected every child to put into practice the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. This created in children the mindset so desired by wider society.

Each institution had its own way of planning the day, both structured and unstructured and the same aims; to support children in care to prepare for an independent adult life after leaving care. The NGO home and the government institutions were regimented and structured with a series of activities to keep children occupied, while the madrasah was flexible in its approach in everything except education.

The NGO and madrasah were highly structured in their educational routines. Educational success was their primary focus. The government institutions on the other hand, did not seem to care whether children went to school or did their homework.

## **5.5. Contact with Families**

### **NGO home**

The NGO welcomed mothers to visit their children at any time except during lessons. No appointment was needed and accommodation was available for those who came from a distance. They were invited to home functions, for example, religious and cultural festivals, meetings, training, sports events or cultural programmes.

Children kept in touch with their mothers via the home's mobile phone. They could talk privately using it; calls were not monitored or recorded. Since most mothers lived in the same brothel, they supported each other in transporting gifts to their children.

Younger children were permitted to visit their mothers in the brothels, but it was discouraged. Teenagers on the other hand were restricted as it was felt they would be at risk. The girls could be sexually exploited and boys pushed into drug-taking or pimping. Those mothers who had their own property outside the brothel could have

their adolescent children visit them for a few days. If children stayed longer than four days at their mother's place, they were given thorough health checks on their return. Children's behaviour was carefully monitored for signs of aggression, sleep disturbance, eating disorders or lack of attentiveness.

Staff were unwelcoming towards mothers whom they had experienced as rude or uncooperative, especially those whom they believed had spread false allegations about the staff and services, igniting the anger of other mothers.

### **Government institutions**

Parents tended not to phone the office to speak to their children and preferred to phone their children directly on their own or friends' mobiles, even though this was forbidden by the institution.

According to Shishu Paribar Management guidelines, only those named on admission forms could visit children in the institutions as they wished. Government institutions were much more restrictive than the NGO and madrasah in maintaining family contacts. When parents did visit, there was no private place to sit and talk so they had to go into the open playing field. Sometimes permission was granted for children to meet their parents outside the institution grounds. Generally the Sadan had nothing to do with parents unless the child was seriously ill or if there was a complaint.

### **Madrasah**

Madrasah children had the greatest opportunity to visit their parental homes on a regular basis. Depending on the distance, children could visit every day if they wanted to. During my fieldwork, I only saw a few family members come to the madrasah itself, even though they could visit at any time. They did not need to register, as visitors were not monitored. Staff and parents only conversed with each other if the parents wanted to know how their child was doing, otherwise conversation was limited. Due to the flexibility in visiting, children maintained strong bonds with their biological families.

Depending on pupil-staff relations, parents could phone their child on a staff member's mobile phone but this was rare. Some parents would call a phone shop located near the madrasah and ask the owner to bring their child to the phone.

Although the madrasah was flexible with allowing visits, it did discourage too frequent visits if they distracted from the main function of Qur'anic memorization. So long as the children did their class work, they could come and go as they pleased.

## **5.6. Involvement with Community**

### **NGO home**

I learned that initially, the local community protested against the establishment of a children's home in their area. They did not want the children of sex workers living in their neighbourhood, but over time the children came to be accepted. In order to integrate into the community, the home provided five years' free schooling to community children and their parents were then invited to get involved in the home's work. People from the community, including local politicians, were invited to the NGO's community development activities (healthcare, micro-credit and agriculture). The home's management also participated in community programmes by donating funds to various community development projects.

Home children attended the local high school, got involved in local clubs (such as football and cricket) and took part in tournaments. The community was invited to special events such as festival meals and national and international days in order to build relations. However, the community was not always sincere with the home. Neighbours openly stole its produce and damaged its property. It seemed that they felt that the home was receiving a lot of money from abroad so it did not matter if they took a few things for themselves.

One of the most problematic and sensitive issues staff had to deal with was sexual harassment by local adolescent boys. They taunted resident girls by calling them daughters of prostitutes and saying that they were also destined for the brothel. Others thought that they would be able to secure a good dowry from the organisation by marrying a home girl. Some of the girls appeared to encourage the boys by acting

suggestively. Local youth who were encouraged by the girls tried to visit them in the home. They often became aggressive towards staff if denied access by the guard.

### **Government institutions**

The government institutions were not interested in building community relations. Their only outside contact was the local school. Instead the children themselves, boys in particular, made their own connections. They arranged football and cricket matches with community groups.

It seemed to me that these children were socially disconnected due to the negative attitudes of staff. The institutions appeared to put up restrictions making it hard for outsiders to connect with the children. The management stated that they did not need to make community contacts since the community did not support them financially.

Staff did not like children making friends with community youth or inviting them into the Sadan because they viewed such youth as a bad influence. Indeed sometimes local youth would break into the compound to play with children, causing damage to the property. Once an outsider was caught smoking marijuana in the compound because the area was away from police scrutiny. The staff said that outsiders had stolen valuable items from the institution. However, no one could say exactly what was taken.

Children attending apprenticeship schemes made friends with those in the training centres. Others managed to make friends during community gatherings such as the national day rally, competitions and other social events.

### **Madrasah**

The madrasah, being set in a mosque, had plenty of opportunities to build community connections. Children were always being invited by community members to perform religious rituals and teach the Qur'an to community children, providing opportunities to develop friendships.

A few children developed friendships while playing with community children and inviting each other to their homes. This helped to build positive networks, which supported children even after leaving the madrasah. Overall, it seemed that the madrasah encouraged the children to be involved with the community.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has set the context of Bangladeshi residential childcare institutions by giving a brief account of the young people's institutional and social background. An account of the physical environment of the four institutions where participants grew up is also provided. Each institution had its own ways of planning the day, both structured and unstructured. Yet the aims were the same: to support children in care, and prepare them for independent living. My overall impression was that the NGO home and the government institutions were more regimented and structured while the madrasah seemed more flexible in its approach.

Moving on, Chapters Six to Nine present the accounts of my interviews with young people. The chapters have been structured according to the themes that emerged in the literature review (Chapter Two) and in the coding and analysis (discussed in Chapter Four) and focus on education; healthcare; personal relationships, identity and social networks; and experiences of transition, leaving care and aftercare. In each of these chapters, young people are identified by the following categorization: M18NGO refers to male, aged 18, from NGO home; F19NGO means female, aged 19, from NGO home; M21GB refers to male, aged 21, from government boys' institution; F18GG means female, aged 18, from government girls' institution; M19M refers to male, aged 19, from madrasah.

### Experiences of Education

#### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter explores education, an important issue for all the young people who were interviewed, although (as will be illustrated) their experiences were very different across the four study sites. Research from the UK has demonstrated that poor educational attainment of care leavers is a long-standing matter of concern, and one that requires major attention (Francis 2008; Jackson *et al.* 2005; Dixon and Stein 2005). It is therefore important that experiences of education are addressed in this study.

#### 6.2. Educational Attainment of Young People in the Study

There are no guidelines in Bangladesh as to which educational grade is considered a formal qualification. Generally, a 'grade eight' pass (see Appendix 3 for descriptions of educational systems in Bangladesh) is seen as the minimum requirement for a job in the public sector, or an 'SSC' for a job in the private sector. In government institutions, all children were expected to study up to grade eight and then undertake vocational or technical training if they wished. The NGO home and madrasah have no such policy. Since 'grade eight' is a basic requirement for entry onto vocational and technical courses as well as various career paths, I have taken this as the standard qualification in this study.

The qualifications of the young people interviewed ranged from none to 'Dawrah Hadith' (equivalent to a Master's Degree). The level of qualification and achievements varied between institutions. See Appendix 3 for details.

**Table 6.4: Educational Attainment of Young people**

Qualification/ Grades	Institution		
	NGO	Government	Madrasah
No qualification	3	2	2
Hafiz			3
VIII	3	2	
IX-X	3	2	1
SSC/ equivalent		3	2
HSC/ equivalent	3	1	1
BA/ equivalent			1
MA/ equivalent			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>

**NGO home**

At the time of interview, out of the 12 interviewees, four were full-time students; three housewives, three part-time employed and two were looking for work. (Since there is no welfare system providing unemployment benefit in Bangladesh, to be unemployed is not feasible, unless your family can afford for you not to work. No-one in my study was in this situation.)

Of the full-time students, the highest achiever from the NGO had just sat her ‘HSC’ exam and was awaiting her results. She hoped to get admission into university. Two interviewees were in their first year of ‘HSC’ and one was studying in ‘grade eight’. Two of the girls who were now housewives were educated to ‘grade nine’ and the other to ‘grade seven’. The young men who were part-employed were educated to ‘grade eight’ and ‘grade six’ respectively. The two unemployed young people were educated to ‘grades six’ and ‘ten’. Five young people (three boys and two girls) had been expelled, putting an end to their formal education.

**Government institutions**

Four interviewees (three boys and one girl) were full-time students, three were housewives and the remaining three were in employment. Of the full-time students, one male had passed his ‘HSC’ and was preparing for university entrance, one had passed his ‘SSC’, and the other two were awaiting their ‘SSC’ results. One of the girls who was now a housewife had an ‘SSC’, the other housewives were educated to ‘grade three’ and ‘nine’ respectively. Two of the young men who were now employed were educated to ‘grade eight’ and ‘grade seven’ respectively. Seven (five

boys and two girls) had been expelled before sitting their SSC/HSC exams. None of those expelled were given the opportunity to continue with their studies.

### **Madrasah**

At the time of interview, four young people from the madrasah were in full-time employment. This included the highest educated in this study- one had the equivalent of a BA ('Meskat') and another the equivalent of an MA ('Dawrah Hadith'). The other two were educated to 'grade four' and 'five' respectively. Three were studying as well as working full-time. Of those who were studying as well as working, one was undergoing vocational training after completing 'Hafiz'-level, one had completed his Hafiz and was studying at 'grade nine' level, and the other was an 'Alim' candidate. The remaining four were full-time students. One had finished his 'Hafiz' and was studying at 'grade seven' level, two were 'Dhakil' candidates and one was doing a diploma in computing after passing his 'Dhakil'. No-one in my study had ever been expelled from the madrasah.

### **6.3. Views of Educational Environment, Guidance and Support NGO home**

Young people expressed mixed views about access to educational resources and the guidance and mentoring offered to them while in care. They acknowledged that they had received all the essential educational materials from the NGO. In Bangladesh, the government only provides free textbooks to those attending government or government-registered schools. Since the NGO children were not attending a government-registered school, they were not entitled to these textbooks. Rather, the home had to ensure that these books were provided, often doing so prior to government school students getting them.

Young people said that staff from the home ensured that they attended school regularly; permission was needed if they wanted to be absent for any reason. The young people who attended the local school were accompanied by staff to and from it, thus making truanting difficult. In addition, staff arranged that all children attended homework classes after school to aid learning.

Staff had regular contact with teachers at the school, enquiring about student progress, achievements and difficulties. Young people appreciated this contact and followed recommendations made by staff. Shamim (M18NGO) stated:

Mohsin sir used to go to my school and meet my teachers to learn about my progress. He always talked to me about every visit. He would ask me about my studies and if I had any difficulties. He always emphasized the importance of education, saying 'cultural activities are optional. If you study hard, you will progress'. He would congratulate me if my teachers gave positive feedback. If I was not doing well in school he would ask me to explain the reason why. He gave me advice on how to overcome difficulties. I felt good after talking to him and would try to do better in order to please him.

Although the home ensured that children attended school and stressed the importance of education, we see from Shamim's statement how much he appreciated it when staff pushed children to do well. Runa (F19NGO), the first girl from this NGO to pass the SSC examination with good grades, also recalled how staff and residents celebrated her results:

All the teachers started dancing and singing when they heard I had got an A. Even principal sir joined in. When I saw him dancing I realized how pleased he was with my results. He arranged a cultural night in my honour. I'll never forget that, it was so inspiring. Everyone's joy encouraged me to continue working hard for their sake.

Young people were pleased that most of the staff had a positive attitude towards them and believed in their potential, as reflected in their activities and actions. Happy (F18NGO) expressed how the staff helped her to realise the importance of gaining admission into a good college in Dhaka and how they helped her achieve this. She said:

Teachers asked which college I was thinking of applying to. I was interested in [name] College, which was nearby. My teachers discouraged this, saying the prestigious Dhaka [name] College was a better choice. .... Now I understand better why they encouraged me to take admission at [name] College. I have more opportunities there. I feel privileged to be a student at this college.

However, not all children had a positive experience. Some stated that a few staff members showed little feelings of goodwill towards them, suggesting that only the academically-gifted and well-behaved students were supported in this way. Nepu (F19NGO), who failed her exams, complained as follows:

Farah apa [staff member] constantly scolded me saying, “you are a good-for-nothing; a stupid fashionable girl. You have no good qualities other than your wide eyes and fair skin”. She would remind me of my birth origin and told me that I would be following in my mother’s footsteps. Her taunts shattered my confidence. I couldn’t concentrate on my studies.

Having low expectations was a problem for children, but so too was having overly-high expectations of them. Shamim (M18NGO) was admitted into Dhaka Notre Dame College<sup>12</sup> through special permission from the college principal, with a view to opening up opportunities for him. However, he was not able to cope with the academic pressure. He failed class tests without telling the home and eventually started truanting. All was discovered when a letter from the college came to the home asking for an explanation as to why Shamim was not attending class. He explained:

The teachers gave lectures in English; I couldn’t understand them. Every day there was a quiz. I failed most of them. I was stigmatised, and this increased when the class teacher warned me that if my performance didn’t improve I would be removed from the class. I couldn’t cope with the pressure [...] so I stopped going to college. Everyone [the home staff] was angry with me, saying “students like you don’t get opportunities to study at such colleges easily. Could you not have tried harder?”

### **Government institutions**

Most young people from the government institutions said they were unhappy with the guidance and support they received. They felt that staff did not care whether they went to school or not and whether they did their homework. They complained that they did not get the books they needed and that educational resources such as stationery and uniforms were inadequate. Young people also said that quiet places to study were limited and that staff declined to help with homework. Rahman (M21GB), who was preparing for his university entrance examination, said:

My worst memory of the staff was when we used to study in the evenings. A few of us would study together and the teachers wouldn’t make themselves available to us. Those who lived on the premises remained in their rooms, doing their own thing. They didn’t care if we needed their help.

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<sup>12</sup> A prominent intermediate college in Bangladesh

Young people mentioned that staff were particularly unable to help those doing higher grade Maths, Science and English. This suggests that home staff may not have been well-educated themselves. As a result, young people taking these subjects had to rely on their class notes or on each other. Nor did they have access to private tutors or extra coaching classes, which are commonplace in contemporary Bangladeshi society.

Bappi (F23GG) agreed that staff lacked enthusiasm to guide and help young people with their progress. She said, 'I shouldn't lie. I never went to school regularly; they [staff] never checked my attendance. You could do whatever you wanted as long as you didn't harm anybody or damage anything'. Nelu (F18GG) added, 'sometimes in the evening the madams would walk the corridors shouting, "read, read", but they never came to check on what we were actually doing'. Masud (M20GB) was particularly critical. He said, '...they cared more about themselves than us. They were busy satisfying their own desires'.

Nevertheless, the majority of young people were able to recall one superintendent's affection towards them. This person had tried to ensure that the institution ran like a family, and was considered more of a father-figure than an official. Rana (M21GB) related:

Sanchoy sir wouldn't tolerate any irregularities. He stayed in the Sadan late into the evening, ensuring that we completed our homework. He turned up everywhere – in the playing fields, the classrooms and the dining room.

### **Madrasah**

Since the madrasah education system was not run by the government, it did not provide free textbooks, and instead, young people received free textbooks and other educational material from the madrasah, where a library was also available.

The majority of madrasah young people said they were satisfied with the way the madrasah functioned and the way staff treated them. There were no classrooms as such. Instead, young people's bedrooms were multi-purpose: classroom, lounge and prayer hall. Young people said that staff did not need to ask them to attend class

because they automatically attended! The traditional madrasah method of teaching was used, which the young people accepted. Classes were of mixed ability, with students at different stages of learning, yet everyone was expected to complete lessons within an allocated time. Teachers were available to the young people at all times. Tanim (M22M) said:

We couldn't be absent from the class. There was no compromise with class time. Hujurs [teachers] became angry if we were late for lesson. Our education was flexible yet thorough. The hujurs liked those who asked for clarification during and even outside of the lesson-time.

Nearly all the students expressed acceptance that their ultimate destination would be working in a religious capacity: in a mosque, madrasah or as a religious studies teacher in a school. Those who did not want to follow this traditional path criticized the entire education system. Hassan (M19M), who had completed grade five in a government school before joining the madrasah, said:

The Qaumi madrasah education syllabus is 200 years older than the modern education system. It is true that we have to learn Arabic properly, but Bangla, English and Maths are also important if we want to get on in the world or follow a different path.

#### **6.4. Satisfaction with Staff Abilities**

##### **NGO home**

The majority of the young people said that they were satisfied with their teachers' abilities. Educational qualifications were not seen as important; rather, teachers were judged on presentation techniques in class and problem-solving abilities. Students preferred those who explained lessons clearly and simply. Happy (F18NGO) said: 'the teachers helped us understand lessons and complete homework in English, Maths and Book-keeping'.

The minimum educational requirement for home staff was a Bachelor's degree. Teaching was part of their remit. Young people said that the home hired part-time teachers from their school for students doing higher grade subjects.

Some young people stated that they had difficulties with young and inexperienced teachers. Sopna (F21NGO) said:

Sathi madam was only slightly senior in age to me. I found it difficult to accept her authority over me. She had little control over us, she was impatient, had no teaching experience. She cried for nothing, she was emotionally immature and couldn't understand the vibes of the home.

This indicates that along with academic qualifications, young people wanted teachers who were experienced, mature, emotionally stable, and who understood their needs as home children.

### **Government institutions**

Children from the government institutions complained about a lack of qualified teachers. Rahman (M21GB) explained, 'we suffered from a lack of good English and Maths teachers; this meant that these subjects were difficult for us. The institution didn't appoint teachers of high calibre'.

Young people said that some staff lacked even basic teaching skills. Sapon (M20GB) said 'Kamal sir didn't have any qualities of a teacher. He was not a good person. He was rude and didn't know how to talk to students'.

### **Madrasah**

In general, these young people felt that their teachers were well-qualified. In the Hifzul Quran section, staff had the minimum qualification of Hafiz. The Qaumi madrasah section recruited teachers who had a Taqmeel (post-graduation) or Fazeelat (graduation) qualification. However, the madrasah did not emphasise knowledge of Bangla, English, Maths or other subjects. Only Arabic was deemed important and young people said that knowledge of more general subjects would have been helpful.

Hassan (M19M) outlined the quality of the average madrasah teacher; 'Abdus Sabur hujur couldn't write in Bangla let alone English, nor could he fill out application forms. I completed many applications for him'. Similarly Gulzar (M17M) said:

There was no bhalo (qualified) English or Maths teacher. Kari hujur (who taught Qur'anic pronunciation) had very poor knowledge of Bangla, English and Maths. Some of my friends knew more than him, since they had completed V or VI class (grades) at school before taking admission in the madrasah.

## **6.5. Views about Relationships with the Community**

### **NGO home**

Initially, young people from the NGO home encountered many difficulties accessing local schools, due to their birth identity and presumed illegitimacy. They were labelled ‘jaroj’ (bastards) and ‘harami’ (whore kids) by teachers and pupils. The local Aliya madrasah initially gave them admission for education in Islamic teachings, but had to back down because of community pressure.

After several failed attempts to gain admission to the local primary school, the NGO opened its own primary school. It invited local children to enrol with the hope that this would reduce tensions between the community and the residents. After five years of primary schooling and much hard work by the home, these children gained admission to the local high school. However, stigmatisation remained. Sopna (F20NGO) related:

We were stressed, under constant fear of complaint, hatred and bullying from school children, teachers and the wider community. Every mishap was our fault, even when community children and adults were the culprits. On the way to school, boys would tease us, making rude comments, shouting nasty remarks. If we ever retaliated or our boys asked them to stop, we were seen as the bad ones! [...] Everybody believed that we were the trouble-makers; sometimes our home teachers scolded us saying, “why would they complain about you if you didn’t do anything wrong?” It was very frustrating and hurtful. We couldn’t concentrate on our studies, we didn’t like going to school; it was depressing.

Another disturbing picture was painted by older children who had fallen behind in their education. They were bullied by teachers and classmates because of their age. They felt embarrassed when they could not understand their lessons, or were unable to prepare for class. Usually due to shyness or feelings of inferiority they felt uncomfortable asking for help. Jony (M21NGO) said, ‘school was a scary place, I didn’t enjoy it at all. Students mocked me when teachers insulted me saying my head was full of cow dung’. The home arranged extra tuition for him but without success. After that he stopped attending school and took up driving lessons instead.

Due to continuous criticism from the community, the home authority at one stage suspended the children’s schooling, and tutored them themselves to reduce tensions.

This did not go down well with some home children, who felt restricted. They wanted to meet other students, make friends and study with non-home students.

### **Government institutions**

Young people from the government institutions did not face any difficulties getting admission to local schools. However, a few girls said the teachers treated them as ‘dumb’, and as such not worth chasing with regards to schoolwork. Nelu (F18GG) reported, ‘we didn’t get enough attention from our teachers’. On the other hand, Rahman (M21GB), who studied in one of the best schools in the district, had a completely different experience. He said, ‘I wasn’t treated differently due to my orphan status. Teachers liked and encouraged me, saying ‘Rahman, study hard, you must hold on to your top position’.

Some young people said they did not face any significant difficulties due to their care or birth identity while in care. Bappi (F23NGO) said ‘community people never disturbed us. I think they treated us well. I can’t remember anything untoward while I was in the Sadan (government institution)’.

### **Madrasah**

As stated, madrasah young people attended school on their own premises. They said they did not experience any discrimination from the wider community as a result of their background. Rabbi (M19M) said:

We were on our own, hujurs never misused our family name. People didn’t look down on us, they invited us to their functions; we commemorated births, marriages and deaths. I can say we were respected.

## **6.6. Feelings about Distractions from Education**

### **NGO home**

Those who excelled in education complained that the home had too many visitors, which meant they had to take time off from school to entertain them. Sometimes they even had to perform during exam times. Happy (F20NGO) said angrily:

We had to perform cultural shows for visitors, sometimes we couldn’t go to school or had to miss classes in order to rehearse or perform. After performances we were often too tired to go to school the following day. We missed school regularly. Many of us couldn’t follow lessons properly.

Young people asked whose needs were met by the cultural programmes: the home's or theirs? They complained that they often felt like 'show-pieces'. Not all children took part, only those who performed well. Interestingly, these were the same children who did well at school.

### **Government institutions**

The government institutions tended not to have visitors. Nor did they offer any regular extra-curricular programmes for residents. Instead, children had to prepare meals for their 'family' once a week, which caused them to miss school. Palash (M19GB) related:

We missed school at least once a week due to cooking. Preparing food for 25 members, three times a day was hard work. It took lots of time. Sometimes I couldn't go to school the next day because my cooking duty left me so tired, cooking 75 meals is no joke!

### **Madrasah**

Young people in the madrasah had nothing to distract them from their education, except the worshippers who came to pray regularly in the mosque.

## **6.7. Views about the Effects of Care on Education**

Nearly all the interviewees acknowledged the positive effect being in care had had on their education. They understood the need for secure food and accommodation in order to continue their education.

### **NGO home**

Young people from the NGO said that having 'safety and shelter' impacted on their education. Some said their mothers had sufficient money to feed them but lacked secure accommodation in the brothel. They also stated that life in the brothel was not conducive to studying.

Everyone commented on the team support provided by the home. Those who were academic said staff worked hard to develop their interest in their subjects, and helped them understand the importance of education generally. Runa (F19NGO) said enthusiastically, 'once I started going to school I never missed a day. I was doing

better and better, passing with good grades. If I had stayed in the brothel I couldn't have dreamt of going to high school'.

Young people said that education developed their sense of rights and responsibilities, increased their tolerance and morale, and gave them a chance to be better respected and valued by the wider community. Nahid (M22NGO) said:

There were lots of negative rumours and fear in society about our lifestyle, culture and beliefs because of our mothers' profession. I won't deny that brothel culture is different. I can't change that, neither can I change what people think, I am not responsible for my birth. If we couldn't get out and didn't have opportunities, we wouldn't have been able to change and we couldn't mix with others, we wouldn't see drugs and illicit sex as bad. This understanding has developed through education and by being in the home. We are now seen as 'decent' because of our education and etiquette.

### **Government institutions**

The majority of young people stated that coming into care had a positive impact on their education, whatever level they achieved. The institutions helped overcome family difficulties and poverty. Masud (M20GB) related:

If I didn't have a roof over my head, food in my stomach and the education I received in the home, I would be a rickshaw-puller now. The Sadan gave me food, accommodation and education. Without it I couldn't have come up in the world and become a salesman.

Some mentioned that although they themselves were not interested in studying, their parents believed it was important and encouraged them to live in the Sadan. Palash (M20GB) said, 'I was very naughty and didn't go to school regularly. My mother wanted me to study. She admitted me into the Sadan. It reformed me. If I had stayed with my parents, I might not have reached tenth grade'.

Young people said education enabled them to distinguish between good and bad. Rana (M21GB) said, 'although I was evicted, the time I spent in Sadan benefited me. Through education I got employment; it motivated me to be a better person and think positively'.

## **Madrasah**

Maruf (M25M) explained how his religious education gave him respect: ‘people respect me, honour me, and greet me with “salaam”<sup>13</sup>. I wouldn’t have been able to earn this respect if I was not a Hafiz’.

Young people reported that the community invited them to religious functions and asked them for advice on religious issues. This built their social networks. This would not have been possible without their religious education. They also felt that education helped them to stay away from crime. Since they believed Qur’anic education to be divine, they felt God was showering His special blessings on them, helping them get jobs: whether big or small. They were content with life. They talked about their involvement in social and religious activities and the responsibility this carried. Rabbi (M19M) related:

A madrasah student has fewer opportunities to become involved in unsocial or unacceptable activities because of his Qur’anic knowledge ... I think Satan sometimes influences us, but due to our education we can’t perform any unacceptable deeds.

## **6.8. Aspiration, Self-motivation and Commitment**

A small number of young people who had done well in their education or extra-curricular activities commented on their aspirations, self-motivation and commitment to achieve something in life. They recognised that in life there would be some bad experiences, but they emphasised a sense of hope, determination and commitment. In contrast, many others regretted that they had not been motivated enough.

### **NGO home**

Runa (F19NGO) was the first girl in the home to achieve good grades in the SSC exam. She aspired to become a Chartered Accountant (CA) ‘because of its high value and prestige in society’. She was keen to prove to those who had discriminated against her that, despite her birth identity, she could succeed.

Herok (M16NGO) similarly wished to become an engineer. He emphasized self-motivation and commitment as being essential for success, saying ‘it is true teachers can guide you and help you with everything you need, but they can’t do the lesson for you. That’s up to the individual, isn’t it?’

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<sup>13</sup> Islamic greeting, meaning ‘peace’.

Happy (F18NGO) said she was determined to excel in both education and extra-curricular activities, because she wanted to take her mother out of the brothel and achieve ‘respectability’ within society. She felt that this would have been denied her, due to her mother’s profession and her own birth identity. In order to fulfil her dreams she said, ‘I pushed myself, worked very hard, never wasted time’. Nuri (F17NGO) was also determined not to follow in her mother’s footsteps into heroin use and prostitution.

### **Government institutions**

Rahman (M21GB) believed education would be his vehicle to reach the level of his half-brothers. They were rich and had given him and his mother much grief. He said, ‘if I want to stand on my own feet in future and lead a good life, like my half-brothers, having a well-paid job is my only option. For that I need qualifications’. He said that without his commitment and positive outlook he would not have been able to pass his HSC examination.

### **Madrasah**

There was a visible sense of determination, confidence and commitment running through the young people from the madrasah, inspiring them to study hard. Samad (M20M) wanted to provide well for his family. He said:

My parents didn’t leave me anything when they died. They were too poor. I don’t want to be poor. I don’t want my children to be poor. I studied very hard. I knew without education my dreams could not be realised.

Hassan (M19M) explained how he had to support his family financially while in care. He gave private Qur’anic lessons and took a part-time job, as well as studying by himself.

Some young people wanted to become renowned Alims and help develop policy. Tanim (M22M) said, ‘I wanted to be a famous Alim, renowned all over the world and contribute to policy development for my country’. He said that in order to reach his target he studied a variety of subjects, some not necessary for his degree.

Others studied diligently to please their parents who had sent them to the madrasah with the hope of one day seeing their child become a religious scholar.

## 6.9. Discussion

Given the small sample size, it is impossible to paint an exact picture of the educational outcomes of young people brought up in institutional settings in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, findings from this study suggest that young people who had lived in care were not necessarily behind their non-care counterparts, and some did considerably better than might have been anticipated. This was particularly the case for those young people who stayed in care for longer. This contrasts with educational outcomes for all Bangladeshi children. Only around 76 per cent of non-care children who enter primary school complete schooling in Bangladesh, with average achievement levels being second grade (BSAF 2007). This is despite government provision of compulsory free primary schooling, incentives to popularize education for girls, and various strategies to educate all children.

My findings are also very different to UK research, which has demonstrated consistently poor educational outcomes for young care leavers (Ajayi and Quigley 2006; Biehal *et al.* 1995; Francis 2000; Dixon and Stein 2005; Jackson and Sachdev 2001). Francis (2008:20) has pointed out that education seemed ‘an incidental matter rather than a central focus’. This is perhaps one of the reasons why looked-after children in Britain have poorer educational outcomes as compared to those in Bangladesh, where education has been demonstrated to be a primary function of residential care. This denies that being in care damages young people’s educational outcomes, supporting Berridge *et al.*’s (2008) study.

Madrasah-educated students did well overall as compared with the other two types of institution. They were more likely to achieve higher grades, and more likely to get jobs at the end of their studies. However, some young people complained about their education, saying that there had been a narrow set of expectations about their future employment. This mirrors broader criticisms (e.g. Omar 2011), which argue that religious education confines people’s free thinking and does not help them to succeed in the material world. Young people in my study countered this view, stating that not everybody wanted to be an engineer or a doctor, rather, being a ‘spiritual doctor for society’, was seen as more admirable.

Although the educational experience of the young people interviewed was variable, they were, on the whole, satisfied with the educational experience they received, appreciating that without institutional care, their education would have come to an end much earlier. The institutions generally recognised the importance of education as a vehicle for social improvement, reflecting the common conceptualisation of childhood as a time of education and training (Bourdillon 2000). This was demonstrated in the efforts to which they went to encourage students to take advantage of the facilities being offered them. However, the way each institution functioned, its systems and practices, as well as its socio-cultural and religious customs, influenced greatly the educational achievements and experiences of those interviewed.

The findings clearly indicate strong links between young people's educational achievements and staff members' attitudes, support and guidance and expectations. The findings suggest that a key factor for positive educational outcomes was a good relationship with a significant adult, who took a special interest in the young person's ability, and provided guidance and encouragement. As discussed in the review of literature, Tizard (1986) and Taylor (2006) argue that successful attachment may take place at any time and between any adult and a child, not just the biological parent (see Chapter Two). This study has shown that even a little guidance, motivation and support from staff helped young people to boost their confidence and determination, enabling them to cope with the stigma and discrimination which they faced because of their birth and care identity, thus ensuring that many achieved better grades educationally. Knowing that there was someone looking out for them was essential for these young people, supporting the findings of Jackson and Sachdev (2001) and Jackson *et al.*'s (2005) study.

Positive attachment was also supported by collaboration between school and care institutions. Children who attended school regularly did well both academically and socially, as will be discussed further in Chapter Eight. The staff at the NGO home had regular contact with the school authorities and helped guide young people's studies; this had a positive impact on their educational attainment levels. In contrast,

it was noted that staff in the government institutions lacked regular contact with school teachers, and spent little time guiding children, resulting in poor outcomes. Staff lacked belief in the potential of the young people and had low expectations of them. Indeed one staff member stated that he felt 'ashamed and embarrassed' when school teachers complained about his residents. This resonates with research conducted in the UK, which draws attention to the impact of low expectations of childcare professionals working with looked-after children (Francis 2008; Sinclair 1997). This study has demonstrated that not only does having low expectations of children have a negative impact on children's educational outcomes, so does having overly high expectations.

Generally, young people were happy with the abilities of staff in the homes but were aware that educational qualifications were not enough. Rather, having positive attitudes and showing affection to residents was seen as more important. Trust was also noted to be essential. This again reflects on attachment literature but also speaks to ideas of resilience. As discussed earlier, resilience is found to be related not only to individual factors but also to the support network which a child is able to call upon (Borland *et al.* 1998). (See also the ecological systems approach.) At the same time, having educational resources such as books and writing material and a quiet place to study, although important for private study, are not a pre-requisite for children's happiness. It was found that the returns gained from increased material support seemed to contribute very little to educational success. Furthermore it was also found that distractions from study such as home activities were not necessarily a hindrance to academic success. On the contrary, extra-curricular activities have been shown to boost confidence, morale and resilience in children, thus supporting Rutter (1985) and Gilligan (1999), as will be highlighted in Chapter Eight. This study suggests that young people's own attitude, a sense of determination, confidence and commitment are important factors for their educational success. Without some degree of self-motivation and commitment, it is doubtful a child will do well.

Young people in this study had a great deal to say about the community, and specifically about the negative impact of being stigmatised by others as either 'home'-children, or, worse still, 'brothel'-children. Some were bullied not just by fellow students, but by teachers and other members of the community, reflecting an experience that Goffman (1963) has called 'courtesy stigma', when someone is stigmatized because of their association with someone who has a stigmatizing condition. So although the NGO young people generally did well educationally, they were often treated as outcasts because of their birth and care identities, and their mother's profession. Children from the government institutions also faced prejudice from school and community because of their 'orphan' identity and deprived background. Only the madrasah children faced no discrimination; indeed society gave them special regard. Such issues are a reflection of social, religious and cultural attitudes and norms in Bangladesh and are in marked contrast to what is likely to be experienced as more negative views about madrasah education in the UK and US (Evans 2008).

Now the question remains, did the education help prepare the young people in this study to join mainstream society? The majority of those interviewed said that education had had a major impact on their lives. This is consistent with several studies: those conducted by Jayathilake and Harini (2005) in Sri Lanka, Martin and Sudrajat (2007) in Indonesia and Lalzallana (2008) in Mizoram, Emond (2009) in Cambodia and Freidus (2010) in Malawi, where it was found that without being in institutional care such children would have been unable to access educational opportunities. Nearly all of the young people in this study benefited from the education they received, helping them to join society and get support into employment, and deterring them from a life of crime. This supports the findings of Harker *et al.* (2003) and Morgan (1999). Overall, the most powerful message from my study is that education boosted young people's morale, confidence and determination, as well as developing their sense of rights and responsibilities.

### **6.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the educational experiences of young people in care and its impact on their lives. It has been argued that the young people from the NGO and government institutions were educationally behind their madrasah counterparts. It is also suggested that educational achievement is enhanced by support from staff and by the length of time spent in care. In spite of the individual differences between care settings, it is stated that young people who spent time in care were generally better off educationally as compared to non-care children from similar backgrounds. Most young people claimed they had benefited educationally from their institution, and felt that care had had a positive impact on their lives because of this. These findings significantly challenge common perceptions about residential childcare (Tolfree 1995) and the negative connotations that often accompany it. The next chapter examines young people's healthcare experiences.

# Experiences of Healthcare

### 7.1. Introduction

Research has demonstrated that the health of children living in institutional settings is often poor (e.g. Monaghan and Broad 2003). Overall, I found that healthcare practices in the institutions that I studied were variable, although young people appeared physically healthy during the time of my fieldwork.

In this chapter, I present the young people's accounts of their healthcare experiences: their access to medical care, diet, personal hygiene and sanitation, health and life skill education, mental health and physical exercise. I discuss how their health needs were met and how the existing healthcare practices, organisational culture and resources contributed towards their preparation for leaving care.

### 7.2. Views about Access to Medical Care

Young people in the study were asked about the type of medical support that they received from their care institution when they were ill. All the NGO interviewees (n=12) remarked positively about their medical support. Those from the government institutions (n=10) and the madrasah (n=11) gave mixed comments.

#### **NGO home**

All the NGO interviewees said that they were either seen by the 'home' doctor or were taken into hospital straight away when they became ill. A six-monthly health check was compulsory. Moreover, a doctor and medical assistant would visit the institution weekly, providing routine check-ups, treatment, health education talks and inspecting the general hygiene of the facility. During my fieldwork, I often saw doctors examining and treating ill children and referring them to the organisation's hospital for further treatment, if needed. It was also common for doctors to prescribe medication over the phone after diagnosing the symptoms.

The interviewees explained that if their friends needed to go to hospital in an emergency they were quickly taken by ambulance and cared for by teachers. Sopna (F21NGO) proudly recalled:

Suddenly very late in the night Asma [her roommate] started crying and said to me she had severe stomach cramp. I awakened Mukti apa and told her that Asma was crying because of pain in her belly. She came to see Asma and phoned the doctor. The doctor sent an ambulance immediately to take Asma to the hospital. She was diagnosed with appendicitis.

I witnessed a number of children taken to hospital by the NGO ambulance for regular checkups or to see a doctor, even if their case did not appear to be serious. This is noteworthy because ambulances are not generally available to households in Bangladesh because of their cost. Hospitals and clinics tend to be located in urban areas, thus most rural areas lack adequate healthcare facilities.

Interviewees said they were referred to specialist facilities if necessary, particularly when the (name) hospital could not provide adequate facilities. Runa (F19NGO) had to see an eye specialist, and explained: 'I was sent to Dr. Mannan several times for headaches and eye problems. He prescribed spectacles'. The home even paid for costly private treatment for those suffering from chronic diseases. Consultations with visiting foreign doctors and specialists were also available. Cost did not seem to be a factor in providing treatment for those who needed it.

None of the interviewees complained of any major illness. Everyone's overall health appeared good except for Popy (F20NGO). She said: 'I have not been well since childhood, always feeling tired, I don't feel like doing anything'. Her health problems persisted after she left the home, and got worse because she no longer had access to healthcare. The last time I saw Popy, she looked very tired and ill. She said that she had been suffering from a chesty cough and fever over the last few days and was feeling weak. Her sexworker mother had suggested she take aspirin, Indian vitamin<sup>14</sup> and Coca Cola. Popy did not go to a hospital or see a specialist doctor.

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<sup>14</sup> Vitamin tablet widely used by sex-workers in the brothel.

## **Government institutions**

The government institutions appeared more reluctant to provide medical healthcare to their residents. The staff could be heard to say such things as: ‘the illness will sort itself out after some time’; ‘this is a seasonal fever, there’s no need to take medication’; ‘it’s a slight irritation, you won’t die from it’; ‘why do young people need medicine for fever or headaches?’; and ‘medicine will decrease your body’s natural healing power’. While none of the young people from the government institutions seemed to be suffering from any significant illness during my fieldwork, they had mixed views about their healthcare experiences.

The young people said that sick children were treated by the compounder, and were only taken to the doctor if absolutely necessary. They spoke about having minimal medical attention, or late treatment. They felt that treatment was inadequate, with the compounder only providing access to a limited range of drugs: Paracetamol for fever and pain, Metronidazole for dysentery, and oral saline for diarrhoea. The sick were rarely taken to hospital or specialist doctors, unless it was a dire emergency.

Rana (M21GB) mentioned that many of his friends did not report their illnesses to the compounder because they felt that they ‘knew better’ and could guess what his prescription would be. Instead, they went to the pharmacy or the private clinic themselves, if they could afford to buy medicines and pay the consultation fees. Tipu (M23GB) said:

If you suffered any health problems, nobody [teacher or compounder] believed you. If you had a sore throat, they would say you have caught a cold, or that it was due to seasonal changes, that you wouldn’t die. Rather we were scolded for having a sore throat!

Some interviewees said they went to the government hospital for free prescriptions and medicine, when allowed. However, most children said they did not like going there because the hospital staff treated them badly, gave them inadequate medicines (usually the cheapest ones) and lacked modern diagnostic equipment.

Private consultations and services were quicker and better. However, the children could not afford them and institutions were often not prepared to pay for treatment at

these facilities. Some interviewees mentioned that a few of their friends had been taken to private doctors for prescriptions, further investigation, advice and even hospitalization when they were severely ill. In these cases, children criticized staff favouritism and preference in providing access to better healthcare for the ‘bhalo chattro’ - the teacher’s favourites. Palash (M20GB) spoke angrily:

Teachers cared only for the bhalo chattro, those whom they liked; especially those who were obedient to them, who flattered the teachers and did their housework. They were treated better than us, always had privileges and facilities available to them, even when they were ill.

### **Madrasah**

The madrasah did not seem to have facilities for, or concerns about, providing conventional medical services to children. Unlike the other institutions, there was no on-site medical assistant or doctor. It was evident from interviewee statements that children had no healthcare expectations from the madrasah. Rabbi (M19M) said, ‘usually I didn’t get medicine from the madrasah when I was ill... I didn’t know if I was allowed to ask for it or not’.

Some staff appeared not to have faith in conventional medicine, preferring traditional treatments instead. Hassan (M19M) said, ‘the hujur<sup>15</sup> asked us to drink hot water, lemon and ginger tea if we had fever. Only if this didn’t work would we go to see the pharmacist’.

Both staff and children bought medicines from local shops. If these did not work, then children might have been given an opportunity to see a doctor. Some doctors were willing to treat the poorest children for free because of their association with the madrasah. However, no doctor visited the madrasah during my fieldwork. Compared with the other two institutions, I came across no sick children. Indeed, interviewees said that they rarely suffered from any significant health problems.

It is evident that all institutions had their own understanding of healthcare and methods of practice. Facilities available were linked to the financial status of the institution, organisational policy and traditional, cultural and religious beliefs. The

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<sup>15</sup> Religious teachers.

NGO could provide the best healthcare facilities since it had the funds to do so besides its own hospital and doctors. It is interesting, however, that none of the government and madrasah interviewees appeared ill during their interviews, nor did they say that they had suffered from any significant physical illness after leaving care.

### **7.3. Accounts of Dietary Experiences**

A balanced diet is fundamental for good health and survival. Without proper nutrition during early development, physical and mental development can be seriously hampered (Bhattacharjee *et al.* 2007; Jahan and Hossain 1998). While food habits vary from region to region in Bangladesh, rice, fish, meat, bread, lentils (dal) and vegetables are the staple foods. The interviewees from all institutions expressed ambivalence regarding their food intake while in care. In this section, I describe the daily food regimes of these institutions and young people's experiences of them.

#### **7.3.1. Quality, Nutritional Value and Variety of foods**

##### **NGO home**

Table 7.1 provides a rough guide of the daily food menus offered to children in the NGO home. The interviewees reported that a more substantial meal was offered on Fridays and during festival days. Along with this, seasonal foods and fruits were served regularly. The home grew a variety of vegetables in its fields, and had a farm where animals were reared. Although a menu was provided, it was not always followed because of the unavailability of specific ingredients in the local market, or other factors.

**Table 7.1: Daily Food Chart**

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Afternoon snacks	Dinner
Saturday	Vegetables, Khichuri <sup>16</sup>	Rice, Egg, Dal, Vegetables	Chickpeas, Puffed rice	Rice, Dal, Vegetables
Sunday	Rice, Vegetables	Rice, Small fish Dal, Vegetables	Biscuit, Fruit	Rice, Dal, Vegetables Mashed potato, Milk
Monday	Rice, Vegetables	Rice, Chicken, Dal, Vegetables	Chickpeas, Puffed rice	Rice, Small fish, Dal
Tuesday	Vegetables, Khichuri	Rice, Egg, Dal, Vegetables	Vegetables roll	Rice, Dal, Vegetables, Milk
Wednesday	Vegetables, Rice	Rice, Big fish, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Fruit	Rice, Dal, Vegetables
Thursday	Khichuri, Fried egg	Rice, Small fish, Dal, Vegetables	Egg noodles	Rice, Dal, Vegetables, Milk
Friday	Vegetables, Rice	Rice, Beef/Mutton Dal, Vegetables	Chickpeas, Puffed rice	Rice, Dal, Vegetables Mashed potato

(Collected from NGO home)

Almost all interviewees gave favourable comments about the meals provided. Rubel (M17NGO) stated ‘we had a variety of vegetables and food items; it was always tasty; we enjoyed it’. Other young people complained that the vegetables were ‘tasteless’ and the curries ‘too spicy’. However, one social worker commented that spicy food was common in the brothels so children were used to it.

### **Government institutions**

Like the NGO home, the Social Welfare Department had a common food chart (Table 7.2) for all government-run institutions. It was supposed to be compulsory for all institutions to follow this chart. However, interviewees reported that this was often not the case. They normally received what was cheapest and most easily available in the market. Many interviewees complained that there was never enough food. Masud (M18GB) said, ‘rice was sufficient for our “family” (group of 25 children, see Chapter 4) but other items like vegetables, fish, meat and spices were not’.

<sup>16</sup> A food made from rice, dal and vegetables.

**Table 7.2: Children's Daily Meal Chart**

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Dinner
Friday	Ruti <sup>17</sup> , Semai <sup>18</sup> , Sugar, Milk	Rice, Fish, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Saturday	Ruti, Vegetables	Rice, Fish/Beef/Mutton, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Milk, Sugar	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Sunday	Khichuri	Rice, Fish, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Milk, Sugar	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Monday	Ruti, Suji, Sugar, Milk	Rice, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Tuesday	Khichuri	Rice, Beef, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Milk, Sugar	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Wednesday	Paratha, Vegetables	Rice, Fish, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Milk, Sugar	Rice, Vegetables, Dal
Thursday	Ruti, Sweet	Rice, Egg, Vegetables, Dal	Puffed rice, Milk, Sugar	Rice, Vegetables, Dal

DSW (2002)

The high cost of food affected what was available to the young people. Palash (M20GB) complained: 'fruit or seasonal vegetables were only available after they were old and cheap'. Tipu (M23GB) said: 'the food suppliers' daily delivery of food was of low quality'. He blamed this on politics, saying that 'the food supplier had very good relations with the super[intendent]. We couldn't argue with him regarding the poor quality and quantity of food [...]. Our superintendent would threaten us by saying that the supplier has no liability. That if we complained, the supplier would withdraw his agreement and then we would starve'.

Interviewees criticised the monotonous food, which they found unappealing. Rana (M21GB) said that the food they ate was not nutritious:

The body needs different kinds of food: fish, fruits, drinks, meats, vegetables, milk and others. If we eat the same food everyday we will not get sufficient vitamins which are important for our health. It will not give us energy; it will not help build your body nor help you to be healthy.

This indicates that interviewees had nutritional awareness, and did not believe the food made available to them was good for growing bodies.

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<sup>17</sup> Hand made bread

<sup>18</sup> Vermicelli

## Madrasah

The madrasah did not use a food chart as such, and did not have a varied menu. Meat and fish was only made available when it was donated. A typical meal consisted of low-quality long grain rice, vegetables and dal. Shimul (M20M) described:

Rice, mashed potatoes and dal were the main foods in the madrasah.

Every day brought the same dishes; tasteless, with a bad smell and unappealing to eat, but I was forced to eat as there was no alternative.

Shimul's testimonial echoes the voice of others. Hassan (M19M) pointed out, 'my first memory of the madrasah was of food, specifically the lack of it. Free food is always tasteless, isn't it?'

The children often supplemented their carbohydrate-rich diet. There were no restrictions on them cooking so, if they had the money, they would buy vegetables, meat or fish from the market and cook for themselves. They would get money from their guardians or from those who invited them to perform a khatam or melad<sup>19</sup> prayer in their homes. During my fieldwork, I witnessed students cooking fish for themselves. Also, family members would bring food when they came to visit.

The interviewees reported that they usually ate better during Ramadan<sup>20</sup>, when they were offered meat twice a day. The community tended to donate meat and money during this time. Tanim (M22M) said, 'we got tired of eating meat by the end of Ramadan. People would donate during this month in order to receive blessings from Allah'.

A small number of interviewees offered insight into the food that the majority considered 'tasteless' and 'inadequate'. They emphasized that the madrasah was heavily dependent upon people's donations, so the situation was uncertain. Shaheen (M26M) stated, 'people donate money when they feel like it...we should be thankful to the madrasah for providing us with three daily meals. If the madrasah stopped serving food, many of us would starve'. This young man (articulate throughout the interview) had good connections with the Muhaddis<sup>21</sup> at the time of interview.

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<sup>19</sup> Reciting the Holy Quran to invoke blessings

<sup>20</sup> Muslim month of fasting when special foods are cooked each day to open and close the fast

<sup>21</sup> Head of the madrasah

Upon leaving care, madrasah young people reported that they had more than enough food, since they were often invited for meals by the wider community. This is in marked contrast to the other young people's experience. Both the NGO and government institution young people were unable to maintain a healthy diet because of poverty, disorganisation and lifestyle choices. All interviewees from the NGO (n=12) and government homes (n=10) stated that they rarely had fresh fruit or milk in their diet after leaving care.

### **7.3.2. Consultation, Participation and Choice in Food**

#### **NGO home**

It is widely acknowledged that understanding children's tastes and choices before cooking is important if one wants to prepare food which they will enjoy. Jony (M21NGO) said he liked the food Banu khala (cook) cooked because 'she knew our tastes'. Although it is not easy to cook for over 100 children and staff, most interviewees gave positive comments about their food. Sapna (F22NGO) stated:

Sometimes we helped Banu khala to cook. She encouraged us to learn cooking. We cooked experimentally, following her instructions. Our experimental food was sometimes tastier (ha ha) than Banu khala's own cooking.

The young people helped out in the kitchen. They were consulted about the weekly menu plan. Selected senior young people acted as the voice of the 'student body' and reported to the administration. Interviewees reported that they were always encouraged to add to the weekly and monthly shopping lists. This gave them a sense of satisfaction and respect. It showed that staff respected children's opinions and requests. Not all expectations could be met, but it was important that the practice of consultation with children was being followed. The home management tried to arrange alternatives for those who did not eat certain food items.

The interviewees mentioned that sometimes they were offered different foods, including seasonal fruits. Shamim (M18NGO) proudly said, 'I like payash<sup>22</sup>, which was cooked each month'. This example indicates that the home management tried to

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<sup>22</sup> A sweet made from rice, milk and nuts

accommodate children's wishes and expectations about food, which helped to develop their sense of self-worth.

### **Government institutions**

The interviewees neither had control over food shopping nor preparing menus because food items were provided by a fixed supplier. They also were not offered alternative items if they did not like something. However, children did have the opportunity to cook their own meals with the ingredients available, if they wanted.

Male interviewees complained that they did not like cooking for their 'families'. They viewed this as a punishment. They felt that there was no practical benefit in learning how to cook since this was not a task that would be expected of them once they left care. Perhaps unsurprisingly given gender expectations, none of the girls complained about having to cook for such large numbers.

### **Madrasah**

In the madrasah, interviewees did not know what would be served from day to day as it was dependent on donations from the community; it was not seen as something they should be concerned about. They did have the opportunity, however, to cook for themselves occasionally if they wanted to eat something different from what was offered. Babar (M25M) said he had little interest in the menu since he believed that the madrasah was solely a place for religious education, a place to gain spiritual food, not bodily food. He said:

Only the foolish rest their hopes on quality food from the madrasah. People have forgotten that everything offered is written in one's fate. How much food one consumes throughout their life is allocated by Allah before one's birth. If we put our faith in Allah we shouldn't worry about food. We will not die before we have consumed our allocated amount. We should be grateful to Allah for His blessings.

## **7.3.3. Environment and Presentation of Food**

### **NGO home**

Interviewees reported that the presentation of food, the place where it was eaten and its surrounding environment played an important role in enjoying meals. It had real meaning for them. The NGO dining hall attached to the kitchen had a seating

capacity of 75. Young people had freedom to sit wherever they wanted except at seats reserved for teachers. Herok (M16NGO) remarked, 'the dining hall was really beautiful, everything was ready. We would be excited to go and start eating'.

Staff joined children at mealtimes and ate the same food. They also kept an eye on children's behaviour. Nepu (F19NGO) explained, 'those teachers who ate with us also kept their eyes open so that everybody got food equally'. Having the staff present relaxed the atmosphere in the dining room and made it appear like an 'extended family'. Interviewees said this made them feel better and also helped develop bonds of attachment with their teachers.

### **Government institutions**

Interviewees reported that the kitchen and dining rooms were dark because of inadequate lighting and trees growing near the windows. This made it hard to cook and eat. The furniture consisted of two long dining tables and two benches. The kitchen and dining rooms were very unappealing. Usually children took their food into their own rooms to eat.

Staff tended not to eat with the children. Rahman (M21GB) said, 'the Bhaiya<sup>23</sup> didn't eat with us, even though it was compulsory for them to accompany us. ... they did occasionally eat with those groups who cooked tasty food'. It did not seem unusual for staff to ask children to cook for them.

### **Madrasah**

The madrasah dining room was a large unfurnished room attached to the kitchen. Children sat on the floor to eat. They queued for their food. One boy stated, 'I felt like a beggar while waiting for food in the long queue'. During fieldwork, I noticed that children near the end of the dining queue were offered less food because of shortages due to poor distribution.

Staff tended not to be present during mealtimes, and young people thought that staff had better food than they did. Gulzar (M17M) commented 'the hujurs didn't eat with

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<sup>23</sup> Staff, particularly assigned to look after the family

us. They used to eat lovely fish, meat, and vegetables, whilst we ate horrible dal and rice'. The situation was made worse as students were sometimes made to serve the teachers' lunches and watch them eat.

#### **7.4. Views about Personal Hygiene, Sanitation and Cleanliness**

The interviewees were asked about their personal hygiene and sanitation facilities while in care and the impact this had on their later life. Interviewees from the NGO home were satisfied with the standard of hygiene in the home. In contrast, those from the government institutions tended to describe their sanitation conditions as 'disgusting', or something similar. Those from the madrasah also reported that their sanitation facilities were inadequate.

Basic toiletries such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, hairbrushes, shampoo, soap, hair, and oil were not adequately provided to the children in NGO and government institutions and were completely absent in the madrasah. Washing soap for clothes was not provided by the madrasah, whereas it was provided by the NGO and government institutions.

##### **NGO home**

All the interviewees from the NGO were satisfied with the bathroom facilities, number of bathrooms and their state of cleanliness. The home had permanent cleaners to take care of cleanliness. They said that each of them received enough water for showering and daily washing chores.

The interviewees said they received basic toiletries which they had to supplement from their own resources. This meant that some young people bought toothpaste in preference to the cheap tooth-powder that was provided, while others were given shampoo from their mothers; some girls also bought their own make-up.

##### **Government institutions**

The interviewees from both the boys' and girls' institutions complained that the institutions could not afford cleaners, so children had to clean their own bathrooms and toilets, with very limited supplies of bleaching powder. They described the toilets as 'disgusting'. It was apparent that staff emphasized cleaning of the road,

playground and compound more than cleaning the kitchen, bedrooms and toilets. I witnessed a few young children sleeping with muddy or dirty feet in unwashed beds wearing dirty clothes. Scabies and other skin diseases were common, due to unclean clothes, bedding and surroundings.

The interviewees received only a minimum amount of toiletries; many relied on gifts from their parents/guardians, if they could afford them. Julie (F21GG) said that staff controlled access to feminine sanitary items:

When we asked the teacher for pads, we had to wait until she found the keys and in many cases the teacher handed the pads to us in front of others. It caused us embarrassment and awkwardness.

### **Madrasah**

Interviewees reported that their toilets and sanitation facilities were poor. There were not enough toilets. Hassan (M19M) said that during his time in the madrasah, there were only seven toilets for over 200 students: ‘They were not properly built. They were often smelly and filthy’. Other young people talked about the long queues for the toilets in the morning. There was no water supply and children had to carry in their own water to use, making the place very dirty. Gulzar (M17M) said: ‘one badna (jug) of water was not enough to wash, clean and use for flushing’.

But other interviewees said that they had had enough water for their daily use. They bathed in the reservoir, using pots to pour water over themselves as they bathed together. They did not receive any toiletries; most used meswak (twigs) to brush their teeth. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees looked dirty or suffered from skin diseases. Perhaps the five daily ablutions needed before praying helped to keep them clean and saved them from such diseases.

## **7.5. Accounts of Health and Life-skills Education**

### **NGO home**

Most of the interviewees from the NGO (n=12) attended health and life-skills training (Table 7.3), which they said they found informative and helpful.

**Table 7.3: Interviewees' Participation in Training**

Type of training	Number of participants
Nutrition	12
Water and sanitation	9
Health and the environment	9
Personal hygiene	8
Puberty	9
Adolescence/physical and mental change	10
Friendships/attraction and love/ expression of feelings	12
Family relationships and outside relationships	12
Reproductive health	8
STDs and HIV/AIDS	9
Substance abuse	9
Hopes and aspirations	10

The whole training programme was delivered over a one-year period. Not all of the young people completed the programme because of absences, cancellations of training days or because they had been evicted from the home. Valuing the training received, Nuri (F17NGO) said, 'I attended all of the training sessions and am trying to implement lessons learnt into my personal and family life'. Not all interviewees were able to put lessons into practice however. Some said they had forgotten what they had been taught, or used it only partially.

A few interviewees reported that because of the training received, they did not smoke or take drugs. One girl, Runa (F19NGO) said:

I assess and analyze before making any important decision now; the training has helped me to think about the consequences of any action. It has matured me. Now, even if friends pressurise me, I can stand my ground.

### **Government institutions**

Most children from the government institutions said that they did not receive any health education or skills training whilst in care. Some girls said they hadn't had any teaching on menstruation, and so when it had started, they had thought there was something seriously wrong with them. However, a few of the children had positive experiences, as Sapon (M20GB) explained:

Teachers gave more emphasis to the adolescent period. They took extra precautions; asked us to pray regularly; some teachers divided us

into similar age groups and talked about different issues; they helped us understand about life, the future and different skills needed for development.

These sessions were very informal and only a few staff participated. Palash (M20GB) said he was allowed to attend a training session on life-skills and sexual health organized by a local NGO. He found it interesting and helpful. He thought that such training helped adolescents to understand personal health and emotional issues. He explained:

That was a very important lesson for me; we felt shy at first talking and listening about sexual issues in front of others, but very soon we relaxed. I found the training essential for all of us. I was lucky that I had attended that session, but I think everyone my age needs such training to understand and tackle our “adolescent stage”, its problems and thoughts.

Girls said they learned a lot from senior residents or friends, but there were lots of myths around. They again stressed the importance of adolescent health education and life-skills training.

### **Madrasah**

The interviewees reported that they did not know what ‘health education’ was. They were not familiar with terminology such as ‘life-skills’ and ‘adolescent sexual health’, which was widely used by the NGOs. However, when asked about personal hygiene and adolescence-related issues, all agreed unanimously that such training was useful.

Most young people said they disagreed with the idea of sexual health training. They were afraid that after such training, children might become sexually active, undermining religious values and social binding built up by the madrasah. They felt that as they grew older, children would come to know about sex. Maruf (M25M) said, ‘why do you need to talk openly about sexual issues? I don’t think it is a good idea to be too open. If you are too open about such things, there is the possibility society will become shameless over time’. Despite this he agreed that these issues do need to be addressed. He thought that one-to-one instruction rather than group settings were more appropriate.

## **7.6. Views about Mental Health and Wellbeing**

As already stated, all the institutions offered some sort of support for physical health, but this was not the case in relation to mental health and wellbeing. None of the young interviewees had had any formal mental health support while in care. However, while they may not have called it ‘mental health’, the interviewees did talk about their feelings and state of mind. They talked about anger, loss of control, fear and the need for attention. They mentioned becoming depressed, violent, agitated or frightened, especially during their adolescent stage, when at risk of eviction or being physically abused. They talked about relationship breakdowns with the opposite sex, friends or hearing bad news from families. This demonstrates the wide range of mental health difficulties experienced by interviewees.

### **NGO home**

The NGO offered some training on anger management for children, and counselling training for staff to support those children in need. But interviewees reported that only some members of staff tried to find out how they were feeling and why. Runa (F19NGO) explained, ‘there were only a few teachers we could trust and share our feelings with’. Many children talked about aggressive behaviour and how staff reacted by punishing them without trying to understand the reason behind the behaviour. Nahid (M22NGO) said:

I didn’t know what happened to me. I felt everybody was neglecting me, nobody was there to listen to me; I couldn’t trust anybody, everybody was busy with their own lives. I found too many unreliable people around me.

### **Government institutions**

Children in the government institutions said they had had no opportunity to share personal problems or feelings with their teachers. They described a large communication and power gap between staff and children, which acted as a barrier in developing healthy relationships between them. The constant fear of eviction added to this barrier. Sapon (M20GB) highlighted, ‘I always tried to make teachers happy so they didn’t pick on me. I carried out their orders whenever they asked’. Some staff treated children very badly. There was nobody monitoring whether or not staff were supporting children when they were depressed or angry. Interviewees said children became very depressed if they were asked to leave or were evicted from the institutions.

## **Madrasah**

Young people interviewed from the madrasah appeared much happier than those in the other two institutions. There were no signs of frustration or mental health issues, even though the madrasah did not have any mental health support provision. It seemed from the young people's accounts that Islamic teachings on surrendering to God had enabled children to have a more positive outlook on life, even when their physical conditions were poor. None of the interviewees said that they had experienced any problems during their transition period, except feeling sad for a few days, and they had no fear of eviction. Although they did not have close relations with teachers, they were able to develop very good relations with peers and maintained strong connections with their families at home.

## **7.7. Attitudes towards Physical Exercise and Recreational Activities**

Outdoor games are the main source of physical exercise for children in Bangladesh. Sports centres are limited and restricted to the wealthier classes or sporting professionals, but interviewees said that they all had opportunities to play, again with great differences in activity levels related to beliefs about the importance of exercise, availability of equipment and institutional norms.

### **NGO home**

The interviewees said that they played every day. Boys played cricket, football and volleyball. Girls enjoyed badminton, dariabandha (tag) or kutkut (a kind of hopscotch). Staff sometimes joined in. Due to the shortage of materials, children often played games that did not require any equipment. They had opportunities to participate in sports competitions at school, and in community tournaments. Interviewees also watched television, and participated in or watched cultural programmes in the home. They went on outings and study tours organised by the home, several times a year. All of them said that they enjoyed these activities.

### **Government institutions**

The interviewees reported that almost all of the children had opportunities to play each afternoon. The most popular games were cricket, badminton, football and volleyball. They had access to a large playing field but lacked sports materials.

Children often bought or made their own equipment. A staff member would supervise children while they played. A television was available to them, but most of the time it did not work or they had only limited access to it. Children never went on outings or study tours. However, they did participate in competitions which they enjoyed very much. The annual sports day had been cancelled for the last couple of years. During my fieldwork, staff from the boy's institution were making plans for a sports day, but in the end it did not happen for some unexplained reason.

### **Madrasah**

Interviewees said that they had limited sports materials. They enjoyed playing cricket, football and other games 'permitted by Islam'. Some interviewees reported playing with different teams outside of the madrasah. Other than sports, there were no recreational activities. Watching television was restricted on religious grounds. They did not go on outings or study tours, but enjoyed spending time with friends and family.

## **7.8. Illegal Drugs and Alcohol**

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, and Islam prohibits the taking of narcotics and alcohol, yet drug-taking is increasing in Bangladesh. It is reported that illegal drug and alcohol-related crime has increased significantly with many becoming addicted, generally those from very rich or very poor backgrounds (*The Daily Ittefaq* 2011). Drugs such as opium, cannabis (marijuana), heroin, cocaine and prescription drugs and alcohol were banned in all of the institutions that I studied and were little in evidence; if a child was caught with these items they were punished or even expelled.

### **NGO home**

Although drug and alcohol misuse is an issue among young people living in Bangladesh, it is more acute in brothel areas because of high availability and cultural acceptance. However, amongst my interviewees only Munna (M15NGO) had a drug problem and he was undergoing rehabilitation at the time of interview. Three other interviewees reported smoking tobacco occasionally after leaving care.

### **Government institutions**

Interviewees reported never having tried any illicit substance or alcohol, or having friends who had; they said it was not an issue for them. They said that they had social, cultural and religious reasons, along with financial constraints, for not taking up such habits. However, three young men reported having smoked tobacco when feeling low and having friends who were smokers. None of the girls took drugs, alcohol or tobacco.

### **Madrasah**

Interviewees reported never having touched drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. They said that their religious education, combined with society's high expectations of them, meant that they avoided such substances. Since many worked for Islamic institutions, maintaining a good reputation was essential for their continued livelihood.

## **7.9. Discussion**

Like their educational experiences, young people's experiences of healthcare while in institutional care were found to be mixed, and it has been suggested that there were a number of inter-related reasons for this.

Medical care policy and practice was found to be strongly connected to funding, cultural practices and religious beliefs in each institution. Thus the NGO home had better medical care because the organisation ran its own hospital and healthcare programme, and because of donor funding, guidelines and management. Medical care in the government institutions was much more limited. Although according to the government institution's guidelines (DSW 2002), a qualified doctor was supposed to visit the institution once a week to treat patients and to monitor levels of cleanliness of the institutions, during the ten-month period that I spent there, no doctor ever visited. The madrasah was run on community donations, which were unpredictable and limited. Donations were used to pay for essential food, staff salaries and educational materials; healthcare was given low priority and instead, spiritual healing was encouraged. This supports the ecological system approach because it talks about safety, protection and well-being including healthcare of children by acknowledging the interactive dynamics, relationships and

responsibilities between person, process and context (see also Aldgate 2006; Brooks-Gunn *et al.* 1993; Jack 2010).

Differences in medical care were also attributable to staff attitudes. The NGO staff had a positive attitude to supporting young people's healthcare needs. In contrast, healthcare needs were often neglected in the government institutions, and unsympathetic staff attitudes encouraged negative feelings in the children who did not feel that they could ask for support. In the madrasah, there was a lack of communication between staff and children over health matters. Interviewees did not know if they could ask for medicines from the madrasah, and usually purchased their own.

Just as quality of healthcare was found to be related to funding issues and cultural practices, so was diet. The quality and variety of food served was, at the end of the day, related to the availability of funds. The NGO had greater access to funds (and guidance from funders) and so could provide healthier meals; the government and madrasah institutions could only offer what they could afford. An institution's policies on children's participation and involvement in decision-making may also have had an impact on children's eating habits. Children from the NGO were encouraged to participate in preparing meals, which they enjoyed. In contrast, children from the government boys' institution saw cooking for the home as a punishment. All interviewees from the government institutions and many from the madrasah said they did not like the way in which meals were presented and served nor the environment of the dining-room; in contrast, a small number from the madrasah put little emphasis on choice in food. For them, fate had decided what and how much food they would get on a given day.

Again, financial resources had an impact on cleanliness and sanitation, as did what came across as very differing attitudes towards what were acceptable chores for children to engage in. In addition, the drive within the NGO for life-skills and sexual health training was found to be totally at odds with the madrasah's perceptions, as evidenced by the young people's accounts, as was the notion of mental health and

wellbeing. Although neither the government institutions nor the madrasah offered formal training, they did put on informal advice and counselling sessions which interviewees appreciated.

Finally, there was considerable diversity in experiences of support for mental health, for recreation and support, and for deterrence from drugs and alcohol. The differences reflected the now-familiar mix of funding arrangements, cultural and religious beliefs and social practices. Reviewing the different experiences as a whole, three key questions emerge.

The first relates to funding and financial support: most critically, how important are money and financial resources for a happy and successful childcare institution? The evidence of my study is that contrary to common-sense expectations, material conditions were not the main priority for the young people. On the contrary, relationships with staff members, with families and with peers were seen as more important for general wellbeing, which supports attachment and resilience theory. Another point which is worth considering further is that because the NGO provided so much materially, this may have made life more difficult for the young people when they left the home; it may have 'softened' them in comparison to those in the madrasah and government institutions, because they became used to a more comfortable lifestyle, which they could not maintain once they left the home. Because of this, they found it harder to face the challenges of the 'real' world, especially if they had been evicted before managing to get any qualifications.

The second question relates to the impact of faith: how did a religious upbringing contribute to overall health and wellbeing? This study seemed to indicate that the interviewees with a strong faith were more content with life, irrespective of the condition they found themselves in. This mirrors findings from other research for example in relation to recovery from mental health and drug and alcohol problems, where religion and spirituality has been found to play a protective and supportive role. A growing body of evidence seems to support the idea that religion contributes to good physical and mental health by aiding social support and increasing positive

behaviour (Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Koenig 1997; Larson *et al* 1997; Levin 1994; Shuler, Gelberg and Brown 1994). Community religious participation appears important for good health in religious societies, which may be true in the case of the madrasah children. Regular prayer in congregations may also have helped to build community bonds and reduce social isolation. The madrasah's religious observance, education and daily practices helped to shape the children's mindset. They were given a strong religious belief that Allah would look after them. Children held this belief strongly and did not worry so much about externalities such as food, since they believed that 'God would take care of everything'. Drawing on a resilience approach it may be said that the madrasah children developed resilience through faith. This had a positive effect on their physical and mental wellbeing, affecting their entire lives; they received 'soul food' from the madrasah, as a protection from life's knocks, something which was lacking in the other institutions.

The third question relates to the issue of culture: how appropriate is it to transpose minority world, Western ideas about health and childcare into a majority world context? This study has shown that concepts such as 'consultation, participation and choice' were anathema in all but the NGO home; similarly ideas of 'life-skills' and even 'mental health' more broadly were not widely understood. By and large, Bangladesh seems to lack a pedagogical understanding of mental health, with no clear policies on treatment. Although there is much evidence from the minority world that looked-after children have complex health and social needs including mental health issues (Hayden 1997; McCann *et al.* 1996; Monaghan and Broad 2003; Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; Vostanis 2010), this was not found to be the case in my study, perhaps because no-one had applied these labels to the young people. It seems to me that if we judge the institutions on the basis of Western standards, they would be found to be lacking. But in fact, the young people's health and wellbeing was generally good across the board, and the madrasah children seemed happiest of all; and it was in living there that they were allowed to retain their relationships with family and community. This brings into sharp relief some of our assumptions about children's needs and rights, as discussed in the literature review.

A good example of this is sexual health training. Many national and international NGOs organise training for young people and staff to talk about sensitive topics such as sexual health. In addition, NGOs often make books and videos freely available on topics such as ‘relationships’, and ‘preventing STDs and pregnancies’, as an alternative to public talks. But this training is rarely accepted, since some issues directly contradict religious beliefs and cultural practices. This suggests that to be more effective, NGOs would have to develop specific models of training, which better respect the cultural values and religious beliefs of the people they target (see also Lieten 2004; Scheper-Hughes 1992).

### **7.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has dealt with institutional healthcare practices and young people’s experiences of them. It has also talked about healthcare needs, how they are met and how institutional cultures, religious beliefs and resources impact on young people’s preparation for leaving care.

The healthcare practices of institutions are closely linked to their financial situation, organisational policy, cultural practices and religious beliefs. Although in theory government policies regarding healthcare support are quite progressive, the study revealed that in practice, the reality was quite different. As well as financial constraints, staff lacked an understanding of health, especially mental health, and how it impacted on a child’s development. It is striking that young people from the madrasah appeared much happier than their counterparts in the NGO and governments institutions. It has been suggested that religious observance, family contact and community acceptance worked to promote mental health and played a major part in children’s happiness. Another important factor might be that the respect given to the religious teachers and pride in membership of a respected institution, increased self-esteem.

My findings are not unexpected for a resource-poor country such as Bangladesh. Its poorly developed health and education sectors, along with constant natural disasters and political instability mean that stress and depression, as well as malnutrition are

constant. Despite these huge challenges, some good is taking place. Although many millions of children living with their parents do not get good healthcare and diets, those in care institutions did. Nevertheless, I found that medical treatment and nutritious food are not the only things necessary for health and wellbeing. Rather there are many interrelated factors. For example; emotional health, mental health, healthy social relationships, safety and security, encouragement and interdependency, and most importantly, spirituality and religious beliefs, all promote good health.

The next chapter examines young people's experiences of personal relationships, identity and social networks, and how institutional systems and practices impact on their lives after leaving care.

# Experiences of Personal Relationships, Identity and Social Networks

## 8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss young people's views and experiences of friendship, belonging, being cared for and supported by staff, and social networks. I describe activities which they stated helped them to develop interpersonal skills, enhanced self-confidence and provided them with a positive identity. The majority of interviewees stated that their in-care experience had had a direct impact on their life after leaving care, both positive and negative. I also discuss the role other factors, such as religious beliefs and cultural practices, played in contributing to their outlook on life, picking up a theme already explored in Chapter Seven.

## 8.2. Accounts of Friendship, Company and Comfort

Those interviewed related different experiences of care, provided different understandings of it, and had different outlooks on life. There were a number of commonalities, however, for example, their thoughts about fellow residents and the friendship bonds they made. Friends were important, as a source of companionship, emotional support and advice, or for help with homework and daily chores. A few interviewees mentioned understanding each other as being important in developing positive relationships. They stated that friends needed to have certain qualities, especially to be trustworthy, honest, caring, and supportive.

### NGO home

NGO interviewees frequently mentioned enjoying their friends' 'company and closeness' as a constant in their lives. Nuri (F17NGO) recalled:

I had many friends there [in the home]. It was a different experience, something very vivid; living and studying together, in the same compound, sharing the same room, same dining hall, same school, and same playground.

Rubel (M17NGO) and Aslam (M17NGO) said their happiest memories of their time in care were of 'going to school, walking and playing together with friends and

residents, and sharing our highs and lows’. Popy (F20NGO) reflected, ‘I had many friends around who understood me; I could trust them, talk to them and share my personal issues with them’. Runa (F19NGO) said, ‘I had many friends, they were like brothers and sisters. I enjoyed spending time with my close friends, discussing all sorts of things’. The experiences recounted by Rubel, Aslam, Popy and Runa are similar. Their comments draw attention to the common feelings of having friends to share their ‘pains and gains’.

Sopna (F21NGO) felt good when she recalled her bedtime storytelling sessions with friends. She explained, ‘we all had different stories to share at bedtime, I would tell one story, and someone else would tell another, that was quite fun...We played pranks on each other’. These comments suggest that institutional culture and rituals had a direct influence on young people’s ability to build relationships.

Rubel and Aslam remained close even after leaving the home. They said that their friendship became ‘stronger than before’, and that they hoped to maintain their ‘friendship for the rest of our lives’. Their story indicates that having a strong bond of friendship enabled them to cope better in the real world. They could count on each other’s support.

The stories told by NGO interviewees suggest that making trusted friends while in care helped them to fulfil their emotional and material needs, and had a positive impact on their lives. It indicates that through this process of friendship-making, young people were able to develop their interpersonal and communication skills, skills which helped to build and maintain successful relationships outside of care.

### **Government institutions**

Interviewees from the government institutions also commented positively about the friendships which they made while in care. Seven out of the ten interviewees said that they had at least one close friend on whom they could trust and depend. Bablee (F18GG) reflected, ‘without friends, life is very lonely’.

Young people shared their feelings with friends, helped each other out while in care and continued to do so after leaving care. Nelu (F18GG) moved next door to Julie (F21GG) because of their close friendship, benefiting both. Their friendship continued even after their marriages. Nelu lived with her mother as her husband worked away from home and could only come home once a month. Julie lived with her husband and two-year old son, her mother having migrated to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker. They depended on each other very much. Julie received love from Nelu's mother and Nelu spent much time babysitting Julie's son. Julie said, 'we are very close; we share everything except our husbands (ha-ha). We live close by, so we see each other every day, and spend a lot of time together.'

Bablee (F19GG) made many friends while in care. Some left before her but she kept in regular contact with them. Once she went to see one of her close friends who had recently given birth. She decided to stay overnight without asking permission from the Sadan, and following this, she was expelled from the institution. This account will be picked up later in this chapter.

Palash (M19GB) commented that sharing meals and personal issues with friends had a positive effect, and developed bonding. He said, 'we shared our food together; there was a bonding with each other in our 'family' [the group of 25 children]; we shared our personal matters; I could trust and depend on many of them'.

Both Bablee and Palash's experiences show that the culture within the government institutions allowed friendships to grow, but was less supportive of friendships with those on the outside of the institutions.

### **Madrasah**

The majority (eight out of eleven) of the interviewees from the madrasah related positive experiences of friendship. As with those from the other institutions, they also found friendship to be a source of support, care and a way of learning important social lessons. Tanim (M22M) said:

I learnt from my friends how to help and support those in need: financially, emotionally or educationally. Friends are the best teachers; you learn about public and private issues without fear and pressure.

Interviewees said that they used to make bedtime jokes, disturb their friends by throwing pillows and messing up their bed sheets. Often more than forty would sleep in one room. Usually a hujur slept in the same room to monitor behaviour. His presence alerted them as to how far they could take their jokes and pranks. However, the hujur normally went to bed later than the children, so they used this unmonitored time to fool around, before he came in. They said that it was not unusual for them to make jokes and tease each other even during the hujur's presence, especially when the lights were off. On many occasions, the hujur overlooked their behaviour as something normal, part of growing up. He would, however, eventually demand that they sleep, since they had to get up very early in the mornings.

Particular rules governed friendships within and outside the madrasah. This meant that young people were allowed to go out with their friends for afternoon walks; they were discouraged from going outside their compound to play; but they were prohibited from attending the cinema. They said that they would tell lies to get permission to go out from their teachers. Shimul (M20M) joyfully recalled, 'we planned beforehand what we would say to the hujur, how to approach him and who would play what role. We were so happy when we went out together, having fun and spending time freely'.

Maruf (M25M) said that his friends helped to cheer him up when he was feeling down, by cracking jokes, sharing conversations or spending time with him. His friends helped him to overcome his woes. He commented 'I felt lighter after sharing my pains with my close friends'.

Shaheen (M26M) maintained regular contact with his friends in the madrasah after he left. He said, 'I can remember everything about my madrasah life.... I felt connected to all my friends and junior brothers'.

The young people's stories demonstrate that friendship was as important for madrasah children as for all others in the study.

### **8.3. Feelings about Being Cared for and Supported by Staff**

Feelings of being cared for and supported by staff was another theme highlighted by interviewees. Ten out of 12 of those from the NGO, eight out of 10 from the government institutions, and six out of 11 from the madrasah said that they felt cared for and supported by staff during their time in care. Interviewees' understanding and meaning of care and support varied greatly, but they mainly appreciated those who showed love and tenderness, and were affectionate towards them.

#### **NGO home**

In general, interviewees were happy with staff sensitivity, attitude, care and the support they received while in care. Sopna (F21NGO) lived in the home for nearly eight years. She said that generally teachers listened to her and valued her opinions, which made her feel good. She noted, 'staff would always be there to listen to us; to support us. We could ask many of them for help, at any time'.

Happy (F18NGO) said that her teachers took extra care over her studies. They would bring in expert tutors if they were unable to help her to solve a problem. She expressed, 'I felt good that they listened to me and helped me solve my problems quickly.'

Interviewees commented that they received love, care and attention from teachers. Some teachers developed a 'parent-child' relationship with them, meeting their material and emotional needs, thus enabling them to develop a caring attitude themselves. This attention, openness and care by staff developed in young people a positive view of life in care. Herok (M16NGO) was attached to a female teacher whom he called 'amma' (mum). She understood his needs and feelings just like his own mother. He said:

All my demands were to Mukti amma, I shared everything with her; she was so patient and caring. She fulfilled most of my needs. She knew what food, clothes and activities I liked and what I didn't. You know, she brought food to my room and fed me with her own hands, like her own son, when I was ill.

All interviewees had favourite staff, to whom they could talk freely and share feelings. All mentioned their former principal who they said cared for them by supporting them in both public and private matters. Shamim (M18NGO) said:

Mohsin sir encouraged me to involve myself in all activities in the home and at school. He helped me discover my strengths and know my weaknesses. He made time for me if I had any problems and advised me accordingly. He never disclosed my personal matters to others. He never shouted at anybody.

Young people also mentioned that some staff would look out for them. Nahid (M22NGO) recounted:

If I wasn't in the dining room for meals, for whatever reason (because a teacher had scolded me, or I had got into a quarrel with a fellow resident, or lacked appetite) Nasreen apa would come to my room and ask me what was wrong. She was so caring. We all loved her. She made time for us.

Badal (M19NGO) loved playing cricket. He was encouraged by one member of staff to play cricket and so became attached to him. He said:

Mohsin sir encouraged me saying, 'Badal, you have good stamina, long legs and arms, use your brain, work hard, you will get a place in the national [cricket] team'. He taught me how to swing the ball, how to catch, how to throw. He was encouraging, different from others.

Interviewees reported that some staff were sensitive towards their issues. They recognised and understood their feelings and tried to help them. They mentioned that during times of emotional turmoil, staff offered advice, support and encouragement to help them to overcome their difficulties.

Happy (F18NGO) used to get many proposals from young men. She did not know what to do about this. She shared her dilemma with her favourite teacher. The teacher helped her to look at all possibilities and advised her on the consequences of having a relationship with an unemployed man and the impact which this might have on her future. Like an older sister, the teacher encouraged Happy to focus on her studies and aim for something better. Staff encouragement, advice and support helped Happy to steer a different course for herself. She said 'I might have fallen in

love without thinking of future consequences if Nasreen apa hadn't helped me understand the situation. Her guidance helped me make the right choice'.

Interviewees said that staff appreciated them when they did well in examinations, performed well in cultural programmes, or had other success. They encouraged those who lacked confidence, were weak in their education, or found it difficult to do their daily chores, in order to boost their morale.

These accounts indicate that the NGO tried to bring up residents in a loving, caring and supportive environment. The staff encouraged young people towards study and extra-curricular activities which would directly benefit them after leaving care.

### **Government institutions**

As a group, interviewees from the government institutions expressed less positive views about the love, care and support they had received from staff. They said staff did not show them much tenderness, which stopped them from developing trust and respect. They complained that there was a power differential between them and staff and that they were often frightened of staff and so tried to avoid them. Some stated that staff picked on them and were rude to them.

Nevertheless, some young people did mention being loved and cared for by certain individual staff members. Eight said they had found a few staff 'helpful' and 'positive' in understanding them and their needs. Palash (M19GB) recalled a story which echoed that of others:

Badrul sir understood us; we could talk easily with him about anything and everything; he never got annoyed; he asked questions for clarification, and corrected us if we were wrong; he would always take our side. He was supportive, caring and likable, someone we could trust.

Interviewees were able to identify a favourite superintendent, whom they felt had dynamic leadership qualities. He established discipline without resorting to physical punishment. Sapon's (M20GB) explained:

I didn't see any super[rintendent] like Sanchoy sir in my ten years at the Sadan. He knew how to make everything happen. He was the

fairest person I ever knew; none of the teachers could compare with him. He was like a father figure. If we asked him for a football, a cricket bat, or anything, he listened. He would say he would try to get us one; he managed even when there was little money to spare. He helped us understand the reason why something was not possible. He was the only super I know who loved us like his own children.

A few interviewees mentioned a female member of staff (they called 'amma'), whom they found helpful. She was the sewing teacher. She cared for their mental and emotional wellbeing and genuinely showed love to all the children.

Bappi (F23GG) had a different understanding of being loved and cared for. She said 'I found all teachers were caring and loving towards us, but not everybody's ways of expressing that love was the same. It is impossible to love and care for 100 children equally'.

Bappi's observation demonstrates that being loved and cared for was part of the government institutional experience, but not everyone could expect to give and receive love in the same way.

### **Madrasah**

Six of the young people reported that they did not feel comfortable sharing their feelings with staff when they were younger. Some of them, however, mentioned that they developed better relations with teachers once they grew older. Some interviewees said that they were unsure about what they could talk to their teachers about, and what to expect from them.

I asked them about the need for individual care and support from teachers. The majority replied positively, saying that individual care was important, but they also felt that it was not that possible in large groups like theirs, where more importance was given to collective care. Rabbi (M19M) posed this question; 'How do you expect teachers to pay special attention and care to each of us, individually? I wasn't alone there; there were 200-250 students. If they (teachers) had to honour each opinion, the madrasah wouldn't work properly.'

Supporting Rabbi, Maruf (M25M) mentioned that due to the huge number of students, staff were unable to honour everybody's individual needs all the time, but they helped and supported them when needed. He explained, 'it was not possible for teachers to make us all happy. This doesn't mean they did not care for us. There were 200 students, if everyone wanted a single room, was this possible?'

Some interviewees said that they did not want strong relations with the staff because they had plenty of friends, as well as family close by, with whom they had strong relations. Though most of them did not seem to get individual care and support, one interviewee, Hassan (M19M) became emotional when he recalled the guidance and support of one of his teachers. He said:

I am very grateful to Aminul hujur for his encouragement, guidance, love, inspiration and even punishment. I am a Hafiz-a-Qur'an now because of him; I can't repay the debt I owe him, even if I was to make him a pair of shoes from my skin.

This indicates the value which young people placed on individual staff attention, as well as the young people's depth of understanding of institutional as well as individual needs.

#### **8.4. Views about Personal Development, Self-confidence and Self-understanding – Promoting Resilience**

Personal development, self-confidence and self-understanding emerged as important themes from the responses. Young people who entered the home at an early age and stayed for many years described their experience in terms such as, 'I learnt everything I know from the institution', or 'it opened my eyes'. In order to fit into 'institutional life', the residents had to learn the culture, rituals and system of the home. Interviewees reported that through this process they learnt to perform household chores, cooking and shopping. Other skills that they acquired were etiquette, modesty and politeness. During this learning process, children developed confidence, control and choice, as well as communication and presentation skills, which would help them to integrate into wider society.

## **NGO home**

All NGO interviewees said that their in-care activities helped them to learn interpersonal skills which proved useful once they left care. Nepu (F20NGO) recalled:

Before entering the home I didn't know anything; not even how to eat properly, how to take a bath, how to communicate; how to take care of myself – nothing. I learnt everything from the home, which was pleasant and also embarrassing at times.

Interviewees mentioned not knowing much about the outside world when they were living in the brothels, because its culture and environment prevented this. The brothel culture and beliefs, as expressed at this time, were very different from mainstream society. For example, sex workers usually did not have time to cook their own food, but bought it from a local restaurant. Again, mothers did not spend much time looking after their children.

Interviewees said that, prior to coming to the home; they did not know what proper parent-child or brother-sister relationships were like, or how to get along with their neighbours. They related that some activities in the home allowed them to mix with invited community children and their families whom they also met through outside schools. This gave them a broader understanding of relationships between family, friends and community. Runa (F19NGO) related:

Still I don't know how a father loves his daughter, what it feels like; I never experienced family life, how parents interact with their children. I don't know how a daughter hugs and respects her father.[...] I didn't know what an extended family was like, the importance of neighbours and community people before taking admission into the home. [...] The home put on different events to meet people and work together. We invited them into the home. Many of our school friends also invited us to their homes and we observed family relationships – love, affection and care, we tried to feel it, we learnt to develop friendships and relationships. Now I am mature and stronger than before. Without the home, I am sure this wouldn't be possible.

Interviewees talked about organisational effort and support to explore their potential, and develop skills and confidence. Many extra-curricular activities were put on by the home. Martial art was compulsory for all, ensuring their safety and protection, as well as physical exercise. Jony (M21NGO) was the international martial arts

champion three times. He recounted the guidance and encouragement given by teachers to boost his confidence. He said that he did not know anything about martial arts before coming to the home, and could hardly imagine participating in an international competition abroad, or even dreaming of winning it. He said cheerfully;

My martial arts teacher's training, guidance, support and encouragement boosted my confidence, made me believe that I could participate, fight and win competitions. I will never forget my first win [in an international competition]; it was quite emotional, and a turning point in my life.

Others said singing and dancing classes were powerful tools in overcoming their shyness and building up their self-esteem, confidence and morale. Happy (F18NGO) said:

I didn't know I had potential; I never believed I would sing and dance before thousands of people.... I won several national prizes. Honestly it was the teachers who helped spark my latent talent.... Once there was a fear I would follow in my mother's footsteps; this doubt has gone. I have discovered myself; now I am studying at a good college in Dhaka. I believe a bright future is awaiting me.

Some interviewees mentioned how the home 'opened their eyes' to differentiate between good and bad deeds, to understand social stigma and community attitudes towards them. Due to their birth identity, many were discriminated against. However, they said that over time they were able to change the attitude of people by performing good deeds, proving their talent in school and participating in community activities with the support of staff. Nuri (F17NGO) explained that 'life skills training, and teachers' guidance, helped me a lot to understand my strengths and weaknesses, accept reality, respect different opinions and to think positively about myself'.

Some interviewees said their peers in the brothel tried to persuade them towards a life of crime, but because of their education and support from the home, they were able to resist.

Young people were encouraged by NGO staff to participate in children's rights and welfare related workshops, seminars and trainings. These opportunities sharpened

their critical thinking, improved their communication and presentation skills, taught teamwork and above all helped them to make new friends. Runa (F19NGO) recalled:

My questions, arguments, logic, presentation style and emotions were different from others. I could see from their faces, they were astonished.[...] Presentation skills training sharpened my critical thinking. Now I can present my ideas, understanding, and feelings with full confidence and can argue logically without any hesitation.

From this, we see that teachers' encouragement and institutional activities both played a key part in facilitating personal development and self-confidence.

### **Government institutions**

Most interviewees from the government institutions described their developmental experiences positively. Though they did not have similar kinds of extra-curricular activities, opportunities and facilities as the NGO children, all of them said that staff had a huge influence on their present life and position. Bablee (F18GG) said she entered the institution at an early age not knowing anything, not even how to eat properly, let alone how to wash her clothes. She said, 'what I know, whether it is good or bad, from cooking to sing songs, my daily work, interactions with others, knowledge of personal issues, all I have learnt from the Sadan'.

Rahman (M21GB) a talented student agreed by adding, 'in fact, I will say, to survive in society and live in it, one needs the education, modesty, politeness, and experience that I learnt from the Sadan'.

Bablee and Rahman's statements echoed other interviewees experience. They said that the institution provided them with life skills, which they needed 'to survive in society including education and other skills'. Some mentioned that staff taught them how to manage life crises. Tipu (M23GB) said:

The Tipu you see today was made by the Sadan (ha ha). There were many bad moments in my life but I was able to overcome them using the knowledge and skills I learnt in the Sadan... The learning environment was not great, but what I learnt from the Sadan was helpful to me.

Interviewees talked about opportunities to participate in activities which they felt increased their confidence, as well as developed their communication and presentation skills. These opportunities helped them to make friends from the wider community. One such activity was ‘display and parade’, on Independence and Victory Day. Everyone was encouraged to participate. Interviewees reported that usually the Sadan team would win the competition; this success brought joy and gave confidence. Bappi (F23GG) recalled:

I was the team leader for the “display and parade” competition. Each year we won either first or second prize. This success inspired us to work harder the following year. On the winning day all of us, staff and residents, celebrated. Teachers encouraged us; congratulated us. These were really most unforgettable memories.

Interviewees pointed out that staff encouragement, positive attitudes, feedback and guidance raised their morale, confidence, self-esteem and aspirations to take on new challenges. They stated that each successful event motivated them for the next challenge. Rana (M21GB) said:

I participated in many swimming competitions, won prizes. One success helped me to go for the next. When the audience clapped or whistled, I felt good. All that recognition helped develop my confidence. ... I have gained many friends and fans [because of this].

The picture here is again a very positive one; the institutions clearly helped young people to build the resilience that they would need in later life.

### **Madrasah**

Interviewees from the madrasah mentioned some activities which helped them to develop friendships and build confidence. Rather than singing, dancing or playing sports, the madrasah focussed on religious skills, such as recitation of Qur’anic passages. The end result, however, was the same: improved confidence and resilience.

In addition, Hassan (M19M) reported, ‘I learnt how to make new friends, and to respect different opinions’. This he believed was his best achievement in life, helping him lead a ‘peaceful’ life and maintaining good relations with others. Shimul (M20M) recalled how the ‘hujurs often asked us to accompany them when they went

for a mahfil<sup>24</sup>. They would ask us to start the mahfil. I think this practice taught me how to deliver speeches in front of audiences, without feeling shy or afraid'. Interviewees said they were trained to lead prayers with the guidance of the hujurs. Those who were studying Hifzul Qur'an would accompany the hujurs for 'taraweeh<sup>25</sup>' prayers, and would often lead these prayers.

Most interviewees reported, however, that their main focus was on religion, as the only way to success and happiness, to be a better person in this life, and be rewarded in the hereafter. Rabbi (M19M) mentioned that they had limited social activities to develop their communication skills, confidence and morale, although these things were deemed important. However, learning about divine knowledge from staff was, he felt more essential in developing lasting relationships. He explained, 'I learnt Qur'anic lessons which help to develop human relationships, encourage people to be polite, gentle, honest and kind-hearted. That is the main source of all skills necessary for life'.

### **8.5. Accounts of Identity and Social Networks**

In many societies, family history is important in achieving and maintaining social acceptability; in Bangladesh, birth identity plays a particularly strong role in developing social networks and thus social security (Aziz 1979; Uddin *et al.* 2001). Those who were born in brothels, and grew up in NGO homes, faced greater stigma than those in the other institutions. None of those interviewed from the madrasah faced any challenges regarding their birth identity or care history.

#### **NGO home**

All interviewees said that their birth identity had prevented them from mixing with community children, and getting admission into local schools, while they lived with their mothers in the brothel. These problems continued to a certain degree, after admission into the home. They only managed to get admission into local schools after the home's management intervened on their behalf, and agreed to many conditions (see Chapter Five). But even then, local protests meant that these

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<sup>24</sup> Religious gathering

<sup>25</sup> Special evening prayers conducted during Ramadan during reciting long portions of the Qur'anic passage.

admissions were reversed fairly soon afterwards. Nahid (M22NGO) felt that, 'people looked down upon us and saw us as a different brand of creature, from an unknown planet'.

Those who left the home for higher studies in college did not tell anyone (friends or teachers) about their origins. Happy (F18NGO) said:

I didn't want others to know I'd come from a home or that I was born in a brothel. All people are not accepting, if I told the truth, their behaviour, attitude, and way of talking, everything may have changed, that would have put a strain on me.... I mean, my true identity could have made many unfriendly towards me.

Runa (F19NGO) went through humiliation from college students and teachers when her life-story was published in a newspaper, after a journalist visited the home. She recalled her experience:

In the college nobody knew who I was and where I was from. Suddenly there was a news article published in a national daily newspaper about my life story, describing who I was, where I was born, where I grew up, who was supporting me, my successes and what I wanted to become. It didn't take long for the news to spread around the college. Some of my friends stopped talking to me, thinking that I was like my mother. I also noticed that the college teachers changed towards me. They asked me all sorts of personal questions about my mother and my life which upset me. I felt insecure and frustrated.

All the female interviewees who were married hid their birth identity and care history from their in-laws and neighbours to protect their marriages. They felt that disclosure of their birth identity, care history and their mothers' profession could destroy their marriages, making their lives unstable, insecure and complicated. Nuri (F17NGO) said:

My in-laws' family are happy with me but they don't know that my mother lives in a brothel. If this is disclosed I am sure their attitude towards me would change. They will treat me badly, which will be awful. I also suspect that they will force my husband to divorce me – as per society's norms. Neighbours can be very rude if it is discovered that one has married a prostitute's daughter. The community may outcast the family. There are many risks. I dare not tell the truth.

Young males who wanted to get married said they were worried that they would not be able to find a girl from a 'good family.' They stressed that though they were able to marry someone by hiding their identity, the consequences could be disastrous if the in-laws' came to know later on. Nahid (M22NGO) stated that he knew three girls from the brothel who had married into a neighbouring community but their marriages ended after their birth identity was revealed. Shamim (M18NGO) also worryingly mentioned:

I knew a man from the community who, he had a grocery shop opposite to the brothel; he couldn't find any girl to marry him. He had to sell his shop and leave the area. Tell me, knowing this, how can I take the risk of disclosing my identity?

Interviewees also mentioned that they had lost their jobs after revealing their care history and birth identity. Badal (M 19NGO) said:

I was dismissed by my previous employer when he learnt that my mother worked in a brothel and that I grew up in a home. I don't know what will happen when my current employer finds out I was born in a brothel. I don't have the security of a father's name. This might close all doors for me.

Along with society's prejudice, Bangladesh's law enforcement agency also treats such children very badly, even if they do not have a criminal record. Interviewees feared police harassment because of their mothers' profession and the preconceived notion that all brothel-born children are involved in criminal activities. They mentioned that if any trouble occurred around the brothel area, all young men from the brothel would be the police's primary target. Rubel (M17NGO) explained:

The fear of police is constant. They could arrest and send us to prison at any time.... Police would ask for bribes. If we were unable to pay, then they would file many cases against us, you can't imagine.

Happy (F18NGO) was furious about the way the home's organisational bureaucracy forced them to disclose their identity, making them vulnerable. Young people needed to submit all their expenditure receipts in order for the home to receive their next instalment of money from the NGO, but in Bangladesh most small shops do not give receipts, and it is very unusual to ask for receipts from people like private tutors. Interviewees who were studying in college, with the financial backing of the NGO,

were very dissatisfied with this policy of getting receipts. Happy explained her experience:

I needed to submit all expenditure receipts. How much I paid for private tuition; how much I spent on travel, food. It was hard to ask for receipts especially for small items like a bar of chocolate which costs only 50 paisa. Shopkeepers asked me why I needed receipts. They became inquisitive and I was forced to tell them the truth.

Runa (F19NGO) explained the reaction of her private tutor when she asked for receipts for the fees she paid him. He had said, 'in my 14 years of tutoring none of my students asked for receipts, you are the first student to do so, I don't have any receipts to give you'. It was an embarrassing situation for Runa when she explained to him why she needed them.

The above accounts highlight the extreme risks and challenges faced by young people in relation to their identity and family and care history.

### **Government institutions**

None of the interviewees faced negative experiences related to birth identity. However, most of them preferred not to say that they had grown up in a government institution, if it was not absolutely necessary. In some cases married girls hid their care history from their in-laws, including their husbands. Some who had revealed their care history had been abused by their husbands and in-laws. Likewise, young males who were planning to get married tended not to inform their prospective in-laws about their care history, due to the stigma attached to it.

Bappi (F23GG) said that her family had kept her care history a secret from her prospective husband and in-laws due to the fear that it could prevent the marriage. She lived with the uncertainty, fear and guilt of being found out. She explained:

My husband and his family are okay but if they come to know that I was from an orphanage, they may say I cheated them by hiding the truth; my husband may become very angry with me, he may beat me and say he doesn't want me any longer; his family may force him to divorce me; or they may be very unsympathetic towards me. I fear the future so I can't tell them the truth. You know, I can't forget this matter, even when I sleep.

Nelu (F18GG), whose husband knows about her care history, painted a painful experience:

My husband doesn't trust me; he doubts my virginity; he says that the girls who grow up in orphanages have physical relations with men. .... My mother in-law finds fault in my every step and complains to my husband; she compares my attributes and skin colour with her other [fair skinned] daughter-in-law and says, "how do you know about family pride and relationships, you grew up in an orphanage".

Though Nelu knew her husband and in-laws were being unjust, she could not protest because of lacking confidence as to the consequences. She did not know what lay in store for her in future. In addition, she could not bring herself to share her plight with her neighbours because of her care background. She continued, 'every night while in bed I think I should ask for a divorce; but then the thoughts comes into my mind: what will I do after divorce, where will I go? People will then label me as a divorced woman'.

Most interviewees said that they were uncomfortable letting people know about their care history. They stated 'people discriminate against orphans. Society considers orphans a burden'. Rana (M21GB) said, 'I have faced many difficulties. I am scared to mention my life in the Sadan to anyone now'. On a positive note, Rahman (M21GB) stated that he did not have any problems within the school, with his identity and care history. He said, 'my school teachers and friends never treated me differently; I was a good student, coming first or second in every exam, that's why they loved me'. Tipu (M23GB) also had a similar story. Since he was backed financially by his brother, he was able to make a name for himself in society. He explained:

I'm helping my brother run his transport business; I didn't have any problems telling people that I was in the Sadan as a child. You know what: if you are poor then it does matter, otherwise not; money can solve many problems.

Unlike the NGO, two government institutions' interviewees reported that they did not experience discrimination in getting jobs due to their care history. Rather they found employers sympathetic towards them. Masud (M20GB) related, 'I never had

any problems disclosing my orphanage life to my employer; he never treated me differently because of it’.

### **Madrasah**

Unlike those from the NGO and government institutions, young people from the madrasah did not face problems from mainstream society due to their birth identity and care history. However, they were reluctant to share their tales of woe with others.

Rabbi (M20M) said:

There is no benefit in passing on my sad story to others. Nobody actually listens to help you except your blood relations, [because] they have their own issues. Man can’t help. I think it is better to tell Allah about ones problems if you have any. Share everything with Him, ask Him for help. He is the only one who can really help you.

Young people stated that they were not discriminated against in the job market, since their education was different from that of the general education system. Often opportunities were greater for them, as Shaheen (M26M) related:

I teach Arabic at the [name] Coaching Centre. Alhamdulillah [thanks be to Allah] I am happy with my job. I wouldn’t get anything better than what Allah has allocated for me, so there is no need to be jealous of others. Teachers of English, maths and science are paid more than me. I don’t mind that. They are doing their duty and I am doing my duty.

It is important to note that these young people clearly knew the future use of their education and learning. Their expectations were minimal, and almost all believed that without Allah’s help nothing was possible.

## **8.6. Discussion**

Friendship and social companionship are essential for wellbeing. Findings from this study suggest that young people developed friendship relationships and networks for a variety of reasons: companionship, comfort, advice and support. In addition, friends helped to celebrate and give meaning to success, whether in exams, sporting competition or cultural events. Young people said that without friends, life was lonely, and often meaningless. The study found that friendships and being in company boosted young people’s morale, self-confidence and self-esteem and that

despite certain rules and regulations of institutions, young people felt no restriction in making friends and supporting each other. Rather, each institution supported the building of relationships, for instance, by organising group work and extra-curricular activities, even by overlooking misdemeanours, such as pillow-fights and mimicking staff. This resonates with several UK studies on friendship and social support (see Berndt 1992; Borge 1996; Emond 2004; Gilligan 2012, Hudson 2000; Kosonen 2000; Rutter 1990; Sinclair and Gibbs 1996; Sarason *et al.* 1990). Research has consistently demonstrated that friendships serve as a vital buffer against stress and help to develop self-esteem. Moreover, my study has drawn attention to the potentially positive side of residential childcare. Developing and maintaining meaningful friendships is a difficult and complex process, yet essential for wellbeing; we need to feel that we belong, and that there are people looking out and caring for us. My findings suggest that young people who spent time in care were able to develop strong and stable life-friendships precisely because they had gone through good and bad times together while in care.

My study also found that the young people could all identify at least one person who had had a direct (and positive) influence on their lives. The attitude and behaviour of such persons showed that they cared about the young person. For most young people, this caring person was a teacher, whom they trusted and could depend upon. They expressed feelings of warmth, safety, tenderness, dependency and belonging between themselves and this 'special' person. Being cared for is essential for wellbeing, but in a care setting developing attachments with specific staff may be difficult. Western literature (Davies *et al.* 1998; Frost *et al.* 1999; Kahan 1999; Sinclair and Gibbs 1998) emphasizes the need for smaller units so that individual care and attention is easier, helping to develop bonds between individuals. Frost *et al.* (1999:124) likewise state that residential care units' effectiveness is enhanced when they are small, providing as few as six places. However, small units would be difficult, if not impossible, to set up in a resource-poor country like Bangladesh. Moreover, my study confirmed that even with the huge number of children, forming attachments with staff was not difficult because all young people were able to specify at least one member with whom they had positive attachments, which endured even after leaving

care. This supports Taylor's (2006) study and negates the argument for smaller units, as mentioned above, supporting Clough (2008), Clough *et al.* (2006) and Smith's (2009) findings that there is little research evidence to back a claim that smaller is better.

In relation to attachment, UK-based research suggests that staff continuity is important in developing a secure base for children (Sinclair and Gibbs 1998). However, research also suggests children are quickly able to develop new attachments and can have many different attachments while growing up (Fahlberg 1994). My study did not support the notion that staff continuity was always essential in developing strong attachments with children. In the government institutions and the madrasah, staff turnover was low and some staff had been working for more than twenty years in the same institution, and yet, this did not seem to have a positive correlation with children's attachment to them. In contrast, staff turnover was high in the NGO home, but many children had been able to develop quality attachments. This is a reminder that the development of relationships between children and staff is a two-way process, dependent upon mutual commitment (Sinclair and Wilson 2003; Wilson *et al.* 2004). Rather than staff continuity, what seemed to be most important were staff initiatives, attitude, and willingness to develop quality relationships with children. Having such supportive adults in young people's lives is important for development, working to create resilience, supplying 'a reliable and supportive relationship with an adult, outside their immediate family' (Jack and Gill 2003:21). 'Supported' children develop an optimistic, problem-solving approach to life's challenges, as noted by Seligman (2002).

Possibly one of the strongest indicators of attachment with staff is when children share their feelings with staff and want to address staff by familial terms such as 'dad', 'mum' or 'brother'. This study found that young people mentioned addressing their male teachers as 'baba' (dad) and female teachers as 'amma' (mum). It is not common for children to address teachers or adults as 'amma' or 'baba' in Bangladesh. Youngsters address seniors as 'you are like my father/mother/brother/sister', out of respect. However, for this specific group of

children from the NGO and government institutions who addressed staff as 'baba' or 'amma', this seemed to mean more, perhaps because none of the NGO interviewees knew their biological fathers; the most important factor in identity and status within Bangladeshi culture. As well as this, their biological mothers were unable or unwilling to show them adequate care and affection (Uddin *et. al.* 2001). The love and affection that these children received from NGO staff compensated for the lack of love they got elsewhere. Female teachers in the home became their 'mothers'. Children acknowledged their love for the teacher by addressing her as 'amma.' In contrast, none of the interviewees from the madrasah felt the need to address their teachers as 'baba', since they were so frequently in contact with their biological families. They may have felt no need to develop such familiarity. Also, they did not face social stigmatization since their biological fathers were known, providing them with respectable identities, even if he was deceased.

Attachment theory argues that children need to develop strong attachments with significant or particular adults in order to develop socially and emotionally in a positive way. My research has shown that many young people in the NGO and government institutions developed a strong attachment of love and affection to at least one member of staff, who became their primary and significant adult. They called that person 'baba' or 'amma'. In contrast, those from the madrasah who had family did not wish to develop a close attachment with the staff, knowing that they had a family that cared for them.

The findings also suggest that young people talked about concepts of relationships and attachment, relating them to a sense of belonging, trust, safety and feelings of nurtured. They managed to develop secure and sustained relationships with staff and friends. Such feelings helped their development by giving them a sense of confidence, self-worth, hope and ambition, with a positive effect on their attitude, behaviour and ways of thinking. Those who had a sustained, long-term relationship with an adult-figure felt secure and safe. This reinforced their confidence, morale and belief in their abilities. In other words, they developed a positive self-image and image of the world and their part in it, supporting previous research by Dziech and

Hawkins (1998), Fowler (1996) and Garmezy (1993). An additional protective mechanism that has been identified in the literature on resilience involves the promotion of self-esteem through the development of secure and supportive relationships (Howe *et al.* 1999). My research found that those who managed to develop secure attachments with staff or other significant adults were more likely to have a positive self-image. It may be misleading to suggest that ‘a positive self-image results purely from developing secure attachments, however, positive relationships certainly lay the foundation upon which a positive identity can develop’ (Taylor 2006:112).

Another important finding of this study is that discovering hidden talents and achievements promotes resilience, develops self-confidence, boosts morale and promotes a sense of identity, pride and positivity about life in the young people who were able to succeed in this way. Young people talked about discovering and nurturing dormant talents and becoming successful. This success inspired them to take challenges, gave them hope, aspirations and spirit. In addition, social activities in the institutions directly or indirectly helped to develop their resilience and boosted their self-esteem. Young people stated that activities helped them ‘realise their potential’. They also mentioned the impact that activities had on the expectations of others, in particular, staff, as illustrated in previous earlier studies (Borge 1996; Quinn 1995; Rutter 1990; Sinclair and Gibbs 1996; Gilligan 1999; 2012). Staff’s reactions provided powerful signals that helped to shape children’s attitudes and beliefs about themselves. However, those young people who were not able to demonstrate talent like this found their lives harder, although they were still able to participate in activities. Low expectations from staff, as we know, can create real barriers to achievement for children (Francis 2008; Jackson and Sachdev 2001).

Young people’s achievements were found to have a positive impact on their wellbeing, identified by Rutter (1985) as one of the building blocks of resilience. In addition, the stories and experiences presented here support the fact that certain aspects of residential care can promote resilience (Newman and Blackburn 2002) and increase young people’s ability to cope with life’s challenges. Stories from each

institution indicate that resilient children can turn negative experiences into positive ways of being, with the help of others. All these stories are anecdotes of how extra-curricular activities and staff's positive attitudes turned young people's lives around for the better.

This study also offers important insight about identity, and especially the relevance of birth identity and care identity on children's lives. As Furman (1998:81) writes, 'it's natural to think that our past has an effect on how our future will turn out, but we rarely look at it the other way round. The future – that is what we think it will bring – determines what the past looks like'. My study found that young people, in particular those from the NGO, experienced many difficulties due to their birth identity as 'brothel' children. Care history was an issue for those from the government institutions. Madrasah young people, however, reported no prejudice from wider society, despite usually being from poor backgrounds. Bangladeshis holds religion in high regard, even if they are non-practitioners, so religious students and professionals are highly respected. Thus madrasah residents are more often granted opportunities denied to residents of other care institutions.

Organisational bureaucracy and irresponsibility forced young people, at times, to disclose their birth and care identity, adding stress, and pushing them into telling lies to avoid stigma, thus damaging their confidence and morale. For example Happy's account reminds us of the importance of confidentiality and the responsibility organisations have as guardians of it. Many young girls also had to hide their birth identity, care history and mother's profession, in order to find marriage partners; in this way, they developed their own defence to become creditable, integrated and accepted. In Goffman's (1963) analysis, the perception of others affects the image we develop of ourselves, thus, negative perceptions within society of those outside the 'normal' family situation contribute towards their social identity. When young people became aware of stigmatization for the first time, they worked to reorganise their 'view of the past' and to 're-identify' it. This led to a 'special likelihood of developing disapproval of the self eventually', what Goffman (1963:34) has called 'spoiled identity'. Young people's stories show that even after ten or twelve years of

good care from institutions, life after care can still be precarious because of discrimination and stigma, which young people do not have any control over but from which they may 'feel the heat' (see Chapter Two). This raises the question of how institutions might better address such issues. Could they do anything to change such societal prejudice? Of course, we know from the interviewees' accounts that residential childcare did give young people skills to take into the world. Yet, this may not have been enough to cope with society's prejudices; the pain of exclusion was something which they would probably have to carry for the rest of their lives. As discussed in Chapter Three, in patriarchal societies such as Bangladesh, knowledge of one's father is important. Discrimination is rife for those born out of wedlock, as Ibrahim (2010) also noted in her recent study on Jordanian care leavers.

The experiences of young people in the madrasah are also instructive in relation to stigmatization. In the madrasah, relationships between staff and young people were less intimate than those in the NGO, yet despite that, these individuals emerged confident and better-equipped to integrate into wider society. This was because they knew that they were in an institution well-respected by the community, and, despite their poor background, were gaining acceptance in society by being part of a religious establishment. There may be a parallel here between the UK public school system, where students leave their families to take up residency in boarding schools as compared with those from backgrounds where there has been a family breakdown who may find themselves 'looked after and accommodated' in local authority care (as for example in Scotland under Section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995). Both groups share the common experience of living away from their biological families, living in institutions, and being subjected to routines. Young people in boarding school will emerge from their 'care' with very different experiences and outcomes from those who were in local authority care. This difference is similar to the differences experienced in Bangladeshi residential care institutions.

## **8.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the experiences of young people in relation to their personal relationships, social networks and identity. Particular reference has been given to attachment with staff and friends acting as a protective factor in promoting resilience for future success. It shows that companionship, comfort, friendship, and being cared for, together with trusting and positive expectations from staff, play a vital part in future success, and that sincere 'parent-like' staff have a direct impact on young people's lives, supporting Yee's (2011) study in Singapore. Parental and community contact, as well as education and skills training, were also emphasized as being important by interviewees.

Stigma attaching to birth and care identity were identified as of special significance for this group of young people. Some were unable to overcome many problems due to social discrimination, even though they had developed characteristics of resilience and confidence in the care home. Without a change in society's and political leaders' attitudes towards those born in brothel communities, I am concerned that we may not see much improvement in life opportunities for such young people. This point will be picked up in Chapter Ten.

## **Experiences of Transition, Leaving Care and Aftercare Support**

### **9.1. Introduction**

For some young people, leaving care is a pathway to independence; for others it is a cause of significant distress. Nevertheless, if young people are equipped to face the challenges of life after leaving care, are properly prepared for leaving care, and receive adequate aftercare support, they will be better able to integrate into wider society. This chapter provides descriptive accounts of young people's leaving care and aftercare experiences, the issues they faced, their coping mechanisms and the factors aiding their progress. It also looks into the aftercare support received and the impact it had on their lives.

### **9.2. Reasons for Leaving Care**

Within the general population, young people living in their familial home, with their parent or guardians, usually come to a stage in life when they decide they are either mature enough or ready to leave home. Age is a factor in this, but not the only one. The decision to move out of the family home may also be because of a desire to have one's own space, or to be nearer to work or study. Such a move is considered to be part of a natural transition from childhood into adulthood.

Young people in this study were asked the reasons for leaving care and their experiences of that process. The most common reasons given are summarised in Table 9.1 below.

**Table 9.1: Reasons for Leaving Care**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>NGO</b>	<b>Government</b>	<b>Madrasah</b>	<b>Total</b>
Eviction	5	7	0	12
Higher education*	3	0	4	7
Full time job	1	0	2	3
Part-time job and education	0	0	3	3
Marriage	2	1	0	3
Institutional regimentation or inadequate facilities	1	2	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>33</b>

\* Some young people from the madrasah continued their studies alongside work, after leaving care.

This table demonstrates striking differences between the experiences of young people leaving the different institutions. Most notably, twelve young people reported being evicted from the NGO home and government institutions, while none of those who had lived in the madrasah had been evicted. The number of evictions from government institutions was very high; seven out of ten of the care leavers had been evicted. The record of the madrasah is more positive across the board for the young people in this study; this mirrors the picture painted in other chapters in the thesis.

Young people who had been evicted said they had often been forced to leave with only a few hours' notice. Reasons for evictions given were: conflict with staff, disobedience and even poor exam results. Young people complained that staff justified their actions by saying those evicted were 'trouble makers', 'lawbreakers', or a 'threat to the institution and other children'.

British studies (Biehal and Wade 1999; Dixon and Stein 2005; Jones 1995; Millar 2007; Stein 1997; Wade 1997) highlight that young people in care are more likely to move on to independent living at a much younger age than their counterparts in the rest of population. In Bangladesh, those living with family do not tend to leave until they are ready to move on, regardless of age, and some never leave because they prefer to live with their extended family (see chapter Three). Government policy in public institutions permits young people in care to remain until 18 years of age. Exceptions are commonplace, for example, those sitting public exams, or awaiting wedding ceremonies (girls only), often stay longer. NGO homes and madrasahs do not have any age limits, and technically young people can stay as long as necessary to complete their education. In addition, donors who fund the NGO home sometimes exert some influence when deciding who stays and who goes.

### **9.3. Accounts of Preparation for Leaving Care**

Young people were asked what kind of help and advice they received before leaving care. None of the institutions provided them with any formal help and advice

sessions. However, a few young people, mainly from the NGO home, did report having received some informal general advice before leaving care, on topics such as 'life outside the institution', 'dealing with difficult situations', and how to access resources from the institutions such as money, clothes and educational materials.

### **NGO home**

Young people who left care for higher studies talked positively about career and material prospects. They reported that they had received general advice on etiquette, the importance of education, and the negative consequences of mixing with bad company. In addition, staff supported them in gaining admission into college, finding safe accommodation and buying necessary household items to start a new life. Happy (F18NGO) had a very positive experience on leaving the home to go to Dhaka city for further studies, and commented:

Teachers prepared me mentally over a few days before sending me into a new world. They arranged fun and serious activities in the home. I was informed that I would have all the facilities that I received in the 'home' when I went to Dhaka... finding accommodation; they [the staff] proposed I view it. I thought the place was safe and agreed...The principal had given responsibility to Eva madam to buy a few sets of clothes and other things for me. I travelled to Dhaka with Ripon bhai. I took my personal belongings [new clothes, bedding, books, photo album and other household items]. He introduced me to my landlord as his sister and requested them to look after me. Ripon bhai gave me 2000 Taka for my personal use.

Young people who got married or found jobs reported similar experiences regarding advice and support given before leaving care. All mentioned that staff worked hard to ensure that they had safe and secure accommodation to move into, along with providing general advice on staying safe. It must be noted however, that all this support was only provided to those who were categorised as 'bhalo chattro', not to those who had been evicted.

### **Government institutions**

The majority of young people from the government institutions said that they received no help or advice before leaving care. A few, however, did state that they had been given advice on the importance of education, etiquette, health and wellbeing during school assemblies. Rana (M21GB) described how his

superintendent, in relation to farewells, provided help and advice to those who left under a good light:

Sanchoy sir was the only teacher I saw who arranged a farewell for our seniors. We gave a small gift to those who were leaving; then teachers gave advice and then a certificate. Sir created a beautiful environment and told them they could visit the Sadan at any time for advice and help.

Although young people received very little formal advice and support from staff, interestingly, a few evicted young people recalled a superintendent arranging a formal farewell and giving advice on various issues. Rahman (M21GB) mentioned that he did receive informal advice on stipends and job opportunities from one member of staff, whom he believed liked him and was against his being evicted a few months before his final exams. This particular teacher consoled him and encouraged him to continue his studies.

### **Madrasah**

Again, young people from the madrasah did not receive any formal preparation for leaving the madrasah. Some young people, however, stated that there was the tradition of offering 'pargris' (turban) in a formal gathering, rather like a graduation ceremony, to those who had memorized the Holy Qur'an, before they left. Staff offered advice at this time to graduating students on issues such as further education. In addition, staff sometimes put forward students' names for potential jobs, helped to find lodgings or arranged private tutoring jobs for them. Shimul (M20M) explained that after graduating, one of his teachers helped him to get admission into the Quami madrasah for further studies. This particular staff member also helped others to find lodgings and private tuitions before they left the madrasah.

## **9.4. Accounts of Leaving Care and Aftercare Experiences**

Young people from all the institutions expressed mixed feelings about leaving care. For many, it was a stressful time, particularly so for those who had been evicted, who said that they felt frustrated, hopeless and unwanted. Many care-leavers said that they suffered from insecurity or a lack of identity and confidence when they left institutional care. Many also experienced being stigmatized at this time.

### 9.4.1. Feelings about Insecurity and Stigma

#### NGO home

All those who left the NGO home felt the need to hide their birth identity and care history from those in the outside world, including in-laws, neighbours, employers and tutors. They feared that disclosing their birth identity, care history and mother's profession would cause relationships to breakdown and so make their new lives unstable and insecure. In order to keep their identity secret, young people adopted various strategies: most did not invite relatives or friends to their NGO home, let alone the brothel; and lied about their past, while others avoided friends they had made while in care. Nepu (F19NGO), married to Robiul, also from the NGO home stated:

I have requested Robiul not to bring his sister or mother (who work as sex workers) to our house, because people can easily identify them just by looking at their style and dress. If the neighbours see them in our house they will find out about our relations, birth identity. Who knows, then we may not be able to live here, they may force us to leave, considering us to be bad people.

Similarly Happy (F18NGO) said that she was forced to tell lies in order to hide her birth identity and avoid the stigma attached to care. She explained:

'I always had to lie to my roommates [college hostel]; and still I've been doing the same acting. My friends ask about my home. But I can't tell them where I lived. They ask about my family, relatives, so many things. I cook up stories to satisfy their hunger. When they ask about my father and his profession, I make up a story. They ask where I learnt to sing, and then they ask how I learnt. I tell them something phoney. Seeing my photos, they ask about those in them. Then I have to lie again. The basic problem is regarding my family and the 'gajakhuri golpo' [cock and bull stories] I have to make up. I feel really bad about it. The fact that I can't tell the truth makes me downhearted.'

#### Government institutions

Young people from the government institutes also did not like others knowing about their care history, unless absolutely necessary. Bappi's (F23GG) uncle acted as matcher, and did not tell her husband's family about her care history before marriage, for fear of rejection. She has had to live with the consequences of this untruth ever since:

You know, one day I was nearly caught out by my husband; we were coming from the city by rickshaw, suddenly we heard someone shouting my name. I looked to the other side of the street and saw one of my close friends from the orphanage. I didn't stop; I avoided her as if I never saw her. My husband asked me who she was. I replied, "I don't know". I couldn't sleep that night. I cried, recalling my friendships in the orphanage. It is painful; this fear follows me always. Since then, if I need to go out with my husband or any member of his family, I dress in such a way that no one will recognise me.

Nelu's (F18GG) in-laws knew her care history before marriage, yet still they treated her badly. She explained, 'I cannot share my painful story with my neighbours or others because I don't know how they will react'.

### **Madrasah**

None of the young people from the madrasah reported facing such serious problems because of their birth identity or care history. However, Samad (M20M) stated that he did not like sharing his care history and orphan identity with others, believing that society only respects those who are wealthy. He related his experiences:

It's not good to share your dearth with others. I never do this. I wouldn't tell you if you hadn't promised to keep it confidential. It damages your image; you lose weight and the acceptance of others. People love to play with your weakness and you can hear insulting stories that you can barely imagine. I spend a lot of money buying quality clothes; I love to wear beautiful clothes. People think I am a rich man. My clothes and attitude make them believe that I have five or six maid-servants at home; while in fact the opposite [is true].

Samad's account reminds us that stigma and discrimination attached to birth identity and care history are inter-connected to other kinds of stigma, that is, around poverty and class/caste. This affected madrasah young people, just as it did others who had grown up in institutions.

#### **9.4.2. Views on Guidance Received**

Some young people from the government and the NGO home said that they felt as if they were 'in prison' while in care, because of its regimented and restricted atmosphere. Yet, after leaving care, most found the outside world much more complex than they had previously thought, and they missed the routine of the institutions. In care, there was always somebody to share concerns and to guide

them. On leaving, young people ceased receiving any significant guidance. Some wondered whether ‘anybody bothered’ or ‘cared’ about them and struggled to tackle the issues which they faced, especially in taking responsibility for their own decisions. Some were glad that they got more freedom, while others acknowledged that their new-found freedom was proving unwelcome. Those who had been evicted stated that they felt more vulnerable than those who had left care as part of a normal transition.

### **NGO home**

Young people from the NGO home said, ‘life in the outside world is much harder than in the home’; ‘there are too many people, too many things to do on your own’; they found these things quite complicated to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Happy (F18NGO), who left care for further education and started living in a student hostel, explained her experience and the importance of guidance:

When I was there [the home], I felt that there was always someone around to guide me. We need to be guided about good and evil, about the do’s and don’ts, study regularly, do the right thing, don’t do this or that – such advice is necessary. If I’m instructed this way, I’ll also be persuaded to follow their advice. Guidance should be like this, there should be a fear tinged with honour in matters of guidance, which one finds in a family.

Shamim (M18NGO) complained that he had too much freedom once he left care and did not know how to use it properly. He realized that this unrestricted freedom was detrimental to him since he could do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted, now that he was on his own. Needless to say, things went wrong and he had to leave college due to truancy. The future of his education was at risk because he was no longer supported by the home. He said:

I have asked Ripon bhai [supervisor cum social worker] to help me get admission into an ordinary college in [name] but the [name] authorities are angry with me. They are not doing anything for me as I am not one of them now. I see my future as being bleak.

The young people acknowledged that financial support was helpful to make life easier but emotional support and advice was more important, especially when it came to solving family issues. Nuri (F17NGO) left care when she married, but felt a significant lack of guidance. She said, ‘I had received financial support, but I found

myself helpless and hopeless in dealing with my in-laws'. She found maintaining positive relations with her husband's extended family difficult, and no-one from the NGO home seemed able to help her to overcome these problems.

Young people who had been evicted described feeling guardian-less and without anyone to guide them, after they left care. In addition, they worried that the police could arrest them at any time, suspecting them of being criminals because they were living near the brothel. They feared that if they were arrested, they would be gaoled, with nobody to bail them out. Rubel and Aslam (M17NGO) explained:

Life outside the home and life inside the home are very different. Now we feel insecure, guardian-less. Fear of the police is a constant threat. If anything happens here, in the brothel, the police may arrest us. We always wonder who will rescue us if anything happens. The home was not like this. There was no fear in the home that someone would beat us or we could be arrested. We didn't need to worry.

### **Government institutions**

Many young people from the government institutions felt the need for a guardian figure to guide, help and support them in their education, career and other needs, especially during the early days of their departure from care. Those who had been evicted described their experience as 'being thrown into the middle of the sea', and that eviction had 'destroyed the flower bud before it bloomed'. The majority of the young people recognised that the institutions had been a safety-net while they were in care. Rana (M21GB) said:

The Sadan was my palace; it held my hopes and aspirations.... It was very painful leaving. I felt lonely, helpless and hopeless. I didn't have any idea what to do, where to go, where to live, what to say to my mother? I started walking into the distance, full of anger, fear and frustration.

Nelu (F18GG) described being physically and psychologically abused by her husband and his family; she believed this was because of her care history. She did not dare to tell others, nor could she find anybody to advise her on what to do about it. She related her painful story:

My husband doesn't trust me, hitting and beating me is his hobby. People see we are a couple, but we don't have any husband-wife relationship. His family members are very negative, especially my mother-in-law. She finds fault with me all the time. It is hard to tolerate this but I don't see

any alternative other than accepting this painful life. I haven't said anything to my mother as this will upset her. I can't tell my neighbours because they might take it differently. Every night when I am in my bed, I think about asking for a divorce, but I don't find it to be the right decision, thousands of questions come into my mind: what will I do after divorce, where will I stay, what will I eat and who will look after me, who will protect me from society's evil eye, how will society react to my decision? I don't have anybody who can advise me about what I should do.

### **Madrasah**

In comparison to others, most of the madrasah young people did not report suffering from a lack of guidance after leaving care. Most accepted that 'Allah is our best guide, He has done everything for us and we trust in Him'. Many also said that extended family members and neighbours had guided them in overcoming difficulties and taking the right decisions. However, a few said they would have liked more guidance after leaving care, especially when their parents were unable to give necessary advice with regards to further education and career choices. Hassan (M19M) explained, 'my parents are illiterate; none of my family members are educated or knowledgeable enough to advise or direct me on what to do'.

This account again draws attention to the fact children from all different backgrounds may spend time in a madrasah, and so their experiences on leaving will vary accordingly.

### **9.4.3. Views on Education and Careers**

The majority of young people in this study wanted to continue their education after leaving care; however most of them, especially those from the NGO and government institutions, were forced to end their studies due mainly to financial constraints and lack of accommodation. As discussed earlier, those who were evicted generally missed out on their education. Some tried to continue but because of financial hardship, limited admission opportunities, or their birth identity, they struggled and then gave up. Yet, all the young people understood the importance of educational qualifications in getting well-paid jobs.

## **NGO home**

Most evicted young people talked about the difficulties which they faced whilst continuing their studies because of financial constraints and their birth identities.

Herok (M16NGO) recounted his experiences:

They [home authority] sent a letter to my school stating that I have been expelled from the home and they would no longer take any responsibility for me. I couldn't go to school since it was 10 km away from my home; the tempo was the only mode of transport; but that needs money. I couldn't leave this school because the new school would ask me about my personal details – my father's name, my identity and other related issues. If they knew I was from a home they may refuse me admission. Moreover, school fees are expensive in the city. I am worried whether I can continue my studies or not. I don't know how far I can go, how much my mother and brother can support me.

Similarly, Herok's brother Nahid (M22NGO) was expelled along with eight others, three months before sitting his SSC exams. Nahid found it difficult to secure a job, and after finding employment as a bus conductor, he was dismissed when his birth identity was discovered. Since then, he has managed to get another job, but he worries about his future. He was fully aware that without education, he had little hope of improving his situation. All the young people who were employed and self-employed echoed Nahid's sentiments. Aslam (M17NGO), who had started a laundry business with his friend Rubel after eviction, said sarcastically, 'we wouldn't be doing laundry work here in the brothel, if we were educated like you. We too would have an office job, with a computer and a car'.

## **Government institutions**

Like young people in the NGO home, financial difficulties and family needs were mentioned as important barriers to continuing education for those from the government institutions. Rahman (M21GB), who had been undertaking preparation courses for his university admission test, explained that his mother wanted him to stop his studies and find a job so that he could take responsibility for the family. He explained:

When I was in the Sadan, I didn't have any anxiety over food, accommodation or study costs. During the time of my leaving care, I was nearly drained by the real world. I don't have a guardian now, nobody is here to guide me, or help me with my educational expenses. Without financial support it is almost impossible for me to continue my studies.

When Bablee (F18GG) was evicted from the government institution, she went to live with her mother in a remote village. Her school was five miles away, and she found it impossible to continue with her studies because of travel and financial pressures. She was angry with the institution for ‘spoiling’ her life by evicting her.

As with the NGO, most young people recognized that education was vital in finding good jobs. However, many also believed that money could be obtained without education. Most of the young males stated that they wanted to go abroad to work and earn lots of money. Rana (M21GB) said:

I’ve a very poor paid job in the sari dying industry. I wouldn’t be doing this hard job if I had an education. I am planning to go to Malaysia to work, to become rich, to erase my poverty, to make a place in society. I don’t know how I will manage to make the money or if I will like Malaysia once I am there. But it’s my dream, hope and nightmare.

Masud (M20GB) worked as a salesman and said that he was content with his job and his qualifications, although he did not earn enough money. He said that ‘when so many educated people are unemployed in this country, then what can we, who left school with little or no qualifications do, except jobs as a salesperson, typist or peon [office boy]’.

### **Madrasah**

None of the young people from the madrasah ceased studying because of financial limitations; indeed most continued studying and worked as well. They managed their jobs, their lodgings, and continued their studies, even though this was a struggle. Hassan (M19M) left the madrasah when he realized that the authorities there were not interested in introducing modern subjects in place of Urdu and Farsi. He explained:

I didn’t have any lodgings after leaving the madrasah. I sleep in that room [he gestured towards a tiny room for the muezzin, now used as a basement for storing construction materials]. My Dhakil exam is in two months’ time. I don’t have any place to study. I use this mosque for study, but it is hard to concentrate because of the noise of heavy construction. I am worried about my exams.

Those who continued studying and worked after completing their madrasah education were anxious about how they would fulfil their obligations to job, studies and family, with their meagre wages. Shimul (M20M) described his situation:

My salary is 1200 Taka<sup>26</sup>. I have only 200 Taka left after paying my private coaching fees. Money is also needed for books and stationery, toiletries, clothes, transports and medicine. Both my parents are elderly. I need to send them money but can't shoulder responsibility towards them properly. I need two more years to complete my diploma and need to go for extra coaching lessons next year. I am not sure how I am going to manage everything.

Others who had full-time employment had no regrets regarding their salaries, position, or what others were earning. Instead, they showed their complete faith in God. Babar (M25M) explained:

I know my employment opportunities are limited; either the madrasah or the mosque. I can't compete with those with general education certificates. There are two completely different education systems. I understand that the madrasah system is not good for wealth creation, but it is good for dawah [missionary] work, to help and guide people in following in the way of Allah.

Some young people said that they did not have any difficulties finding a job, while others who were still students believed getting a job would not be a problem once they had completed their education, because there are many mosques to choose from.

Two interviewees, who had left the madrasah of their own accord without qualifications, had not managed to get what they saw as good jobs. One worked as a dish-washer in a small canteen, while the other worked in a tailoring shop. Neither of them was happy with their present situation. Gulzar (M17M) complained:

My mother sent me to a tailoring shop to learn sewing after I left the madrasah. After three years of training, I am now being paid a small salary. Tailoring is not profitable. People prefer to buy readymade clothes; they are cheaper and much more varied. People hardly come to us for making new clothes nowadays. They only come for alterations or stitching; I don't have skills to do anything else; also I did not complete my education. Only Allah knows how I am going to survive when I am older.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Pound Sterling = 120 Taka at the time of writing

#### **9.4.4. Views on Survival and Shelter**

Survival and shelter were key issues for young people, especially those who had been evicted or left care early of their own free will. The majority of them had come from poor backgrounds, and had relied on the institutions to help by providing food, shelter and education.

##### **NGO home**

Those evicted from the NGO home and who had no family said that they often had neither enough food to eat, nor a place to sleep. Those whose mothers worked in the brothel had access to money, but nowhere to sleep, since their mother's room was also her workplace. Nahid (M22NGO) said, 'I can count on my hand how many nights I was able to sleep in our house; my mother could give me money to spend, but not a place to sleep'.

Recently married Popy (F20NGO) said anxiously:

If anything happens in my marriage, I won't have anywhere to go. My mother has left the brothel and married a man; I don't think I can go there. I don't like my father; I will not go to him even as a last resort. Anyway, how can he help me? He has his own family.

##### **Government institutions**

Young people from the government institutions also talked about survival issues after leaving care. Many went hungry because their parents or guardians could not afford to feed them due to poverty. They had entered care because of family breakdown, maltreatment or parental death, so there was no-one to fall back on when they left care. Masud (M20GB) said that he ate only once a day for the first few weeks after leaving the institution. Similarly Nelu (F18GG) explained:

My mother left my father when he remarried. She was a poorly paid temporary cleaner in the DC office; she hardly had enough money to feed us after paying the rent.

##### **Madrasah**

Most young people from the madrasah had been able to secure jobs or lodgings before leaving. However, those who left early voluntarily did face problems in relation to survival and shelter. Hassan (M18M) said that he did not have enough

money to buy food, and so went without for many days after he had decided to leave the madrasah. Gulzar (M17M) stated:

I ran away many times from the madrasah; I didn't go home for fear that my mother would beat me, so I slept in the union Parishad [lowest administrative unit] college corridors and under trees. Finally I left the madrasah for good. My mother worked as a domestic helper earning a small wage. She sent me to my paternal grandmother's house because she could not feed me regularly.

## **9.5. Feelings about Aftercare Support**

Those who left in good grace often obtained aftercare support and help from their institution, family, friends and other social networks, to find employment, and accommodation, accessing higher education, and get financial aid. However, those who were evicted did not receive any support from their institutions; in fact the institutions did not seem to care to find out how the evicted young person was even coping in the outside world. Evicted young people themselves also did not keep in touch with their institutions. In this section, I note formal and informal sources of support which young people received, and how these impacted on their lives.

### **9.5.1. Institutional Support**

As noted above, institutional support was only available to those who left in a planned way, not to those who had been evicted or left of their own accord before their expected leaving-date.

#### **NGO home**

Most young people from the NGO home described positive experiences about aftercare support, even though the institution did not have any formal aftercare policy or strategy for care leavers. Support included:

- financial aid for education and training
- lodgings and maintenance
- healthcare
- help with finding or being recommended for jobs, and
- help with arranging marriage.

Young people were expected to come to the home to collect support packages (money and clothing etc.) or to get support as and when needed. Being an NGO, the organization was diligent in supporting those who had left care in order to set an

example to others and prove that if children got proper care and support, they could excel. This they hoped should increase the positive image of the establishment.

Jony (M21NGO) had been working in the organization's hospital as an ambulance driver over the last four years and had recently married a girl from the same home. He explained how the home helped him:

When I came out from the home, the authorities allowed me to undertake training in driving. They then offered me a job as an ambulance driver. After four years of working, I disclosed my relationship with Nepu to the Karate teacher. He informed the principal who arranged our marriage. They [the NGO] paid for the wedding, Nepu's jewellery and all household items, including a fridge and TV. They acted the way parents normally do. You know, ED sir took special care of us. Now I earn money, yet during the Eid festival ED sir gifts us money to buy clothes and other things. I think these days even real parents don't do that much for their children.

All the young people reported that they were welcome to visit the home whenever they wished and that they tried to go at least every weekend. They were invited on special occasions and festivals. During my fieldwork, I met one married ex-resident who, although having left a year ago, was visiting the home for three days. Young people who had left to go to college also spent their college holidays in the home. For example, Runa (F19NGO) said, 'I can go to the home at any time and stay there. My bed is still vacant. When I go home [the NGO home], I sleep in my own bed'.

Some young people felt that they received a lot of emotional support from the institution; others felt that it was not enough. Although Runa (F19NGO) had mentioned that she was grateful for the support the home had given her (with her studies, private tuition and accommodation), yet she was unhappy with the way staff treated her when she visited the home and stayed over. She identified a lack of intimacy and engagement from the staff. She said, 'everybody treats me as a guest, not as a family member'.

Nuri (F17NGO) complained about the irregular contact she had with her family from the home. She said:

The staff don't contact me regularly; no one ever visited my home except for Ripon bhai. I can't give any satisfactory answers when my in-laws ask me why my family do not visit me often. You know, it is the custom of this village that the girl's family visit her in-laws. It shows that she has family looking out for her.

As she continued, Nuri became emotional and her eyes filled with tears. She said 'if I was their real daughter they would visit me. Financial support and phone calls alone are not enough. Visits are important too'.

Some young people, for example, Sonia (F24NGO), pointed out that the authority discriminated against certain individuals when it came to providing financial and other support packages to young people. She was not happy with her aftercare support, even though the organization had provided her with a husband and a job, and paid her wedding costs. When she heard other young people had obtained more support financially than she had, it angered her. She said, 'This creates division amongst us and creates problems within the home.' She demanded cash, a television set, gold jewellery and a job for herself; threatening to hold a press conference against the organization if her demands were not met. The organisation conceded, except for the job (Field note, February 11, 2007).

### **Government institutions**

The government institutions had a written policy stating young people would receive aftercare support in:

- job-seeking
- further education or vocational training
- a micro-credit loan for those wanting to set up their business
- a grant for wedding expenses (girls only)

Out of the four girls from the government institution who participated in this study, only one had obtained a grant for her wedding expenditure. Julie's (F21GG) mother had applied to the institution for a grant for her wedding and received 10,000 Taka. This was Julie's only aftercare support, and the rest of the participants in my study were not entitled to apply for the grant, either because of eviction, or because they had left the institution of their own accord.

Government jobs reserve a 10 per cent quota for orphans and disabled people (DSW 2005), and institutional authorities do their best to find jobs for their residents in order to secure them a brighter future. One former student<sup>27</sup>, who worked as a typist in the Deputy Commissioner's office, informed me that 'Badal sir [the superintendent] forwarded my application to the DC and arranged for a meeting with him before my interview, he helped me get my job.' He also mentioned that another young person from the government institution recently obtained a job in the Deputy Commissioner's office with the help of institutional support and lobbying.

Staff tried their level best to find potential jobs for care leavers. One former superintendent, who had been transferred to the district office for career progression requested that I pursue my former organisation's ED to offer a job to one of his care leavers, because applications for positions were often so numerous. Having good connections and constant lobbying with the organisation often resulted in success. He believed that I could 'pull a few strings' for the young man.

Young people reported that they were prevented access to their institutions after leaving care if something went wrong. A few said that sometimes institutional authorities discouraged them from visiting former institutions or meeting with other residents. Rana (M21GB) explained:

Each year on the 26th March [Bangladeshi Independence Day] and 16th December [Victory Day], the orphanage provided quality meals for us. If a former student came to the orphanage to visit us on those days, the teachers would suspect that he had come for the meal. This happened to me last year. I went to visit other students. One teacher commented to another student: "Rana has come here today for the good food".

Some evicted young people asked why staff helped and cared for some young people, found jobs for them, supported their education and livelihood, but not others. They felt that aftercare support was heavily influenced by favouritism. If they followed personal and official orders from staff obediently and respectfully they were more likely to get support from staff, and were labelled, 'bhalo chattro' or favourite. 'Bhalo chattros' always waited for orders from staff, even when it was study time, or some other activity was taking place.

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<sup>27</sup> He declined to be interviewed due to time constraints.

Of course, some staff may have helped the ‘bhalo chattro’ due to love, sympathy and responsibility which developed over time towards these young people. Rana (M21GB) mentioned the following about a ‘bhalo chattro’:

It is good that Asad has got the job; I heard Jamal sir helped him get it. When I was in the Sadan I saw Asad running around, doing this and that, carrying out Jamal sir’s and others’ orders. He used to get several orders at the same time. Everybody wanted their work done first. I never heard Asad complain, denying or regretting anybody’s order. He never refused, even if someone asked him to repair their shoes. Since Asad spent much time performing duties for Jamal sir and his family, I think that’s why Jamal sir helped him get the job.

Some of the young people did not have any expectations from their institutions or staff regarding aftercare support and did not want to contact their former teachers. These young people sometimes mentioned staff ‘irresponsibility’ while they were in care; how staff behaved towards them, their negative characters, and unwillingness to help and support residents. Sapon (M20GB) mentioned his teacher’s rudeness when he was forced to leave the institution a few months before his SSC examination. He took his eviction positively, leaving everything in ‘Allah’s hands’. He stated, ‘thanks be to Allah, whatever He does is for the best. My eviction from the Sadan was a blessing’.

### **Madrasah**

The madrasah had no written policy for supporting young people after leaving care, nor was support expected. They believed the madrasah did not have any responsibility for young people once they graduated or left. Interestingly, young people from the madrasah seemed more content than those from the other two institutions. They did not complain about any lack of formal aftercare support. Some did acknowledge that aftercare support would have been helpful, but added that not everybody needed it. Although there was no formal provision for aftercare support, staff and committee members supported young people after leaving care to find:

- Jobs
- Lodgings
- Private tuition

Tanim (M22M) explained:

I am doing a diploma course in computing at (name of the institution). The management [madrasah] committee helped me get admission and asked (name) to waive my tuition fees. [name] agreed. They even provided me with accommodation.

Some young people said that their teachers provided them with information and references for jobs and lodgings. Shimul (M20M) said that he got his job through his teacher's recommendation.

Staff also helped young people by arranging marriages for them, if needed. On occasion they even gave their daughters' hand in marriage to those whom they felt were worthy. When these young men became their sons-in-law, they obtained more support in finding jobs, or were given financial help if required.

### **9.5.2. Family and Friends**

Most young people reported that they had received support from their parents, extended family, or friends at different stages of leaving care, in particular during the initial period of leaving care. Support received varied a lot, but generally consisted of accommodation, finance, help with further education, or employment or emotional and practical support.

### **NGO home**

All evicted young people from the NGO home reported their first destination after leaving care was either their mother's or a friend's house. Those who were not evicted moved directly to a college hostel or a rented house. For those whose mothers could afford it, rented houses outside the brothel area were available, as well as help to continue their studies or find a job. The mothers of those who were academic took out loans (often with high interest rates) to support them in their education. Herok (M16NGO), an evicted youth who always did well in class, was supported by his mother and brother to continue his education. He said:

My mother rented a house for us (him and his brother). She assured me she would do everything she could to allow me to continue my studies. She bought me a bike to get to school on time; she gave me money for food as she didn't have time to cook for us. She always encouraged me to study hard.

Shamim's (M18NGO) aunt and his 'father' (mother's permanent client) helped him to find a place to live outside the brothel and paid his daily costs. He said 'I am staying temporarily in this rented house; I don't know how long my family will be able to continue paying for my rent and giving me money for food'.

Young people were also supported by friends in accessing temporary accommodation, food and pocket money. In some cases, friends' emotional support helped them to steer clear of illegal activities and drugs. Rubel (M17NGO) helped his close friend Aslam (M17NGO) by sharing his house and food, and by helping to recall lessons that they had both received on the consequences of drug-taking. In return, Aslam helped Rubel to start a business. Eventually they became business partners. Both said that they had helped each other, emotionally and financially, to survive after leaving care.

Those who left care for further education, employment or marriage, highly appreciated the emotional and practical support that they received from their families and friends during and after transition. Most had regular contacts with parents, family members and friends which were essential for settling down in life.

### **Government institutions**

Young people from the government institutions mostly cited their parents and siblings as their aftercare support, but extended family and friends also featured. Families tended to provide both material and emotional support, according to their capacity, while friends helped mostly with emotional issues. All young people went to their parents' home after leaving care. From there they started searching for jobs, educational opportunities, vocational training, and widened their social network. Young people found their families' and friends' help essential, valuing the advice along with the financial, emotional and practical support which they offered.

### **Madrasah**

Like the other two institutions, young people from the madrasah talked about the importance of family and friends when they left care. They often mentioned

grandparents as well as parents as important sources of support. Young people knew that they could always return to their families when they needed support. Shaheen (M26M) had been financially supported by a rich man, whom he addressed as 'father' after leaving care. This man helped him to find employment.

All young people acknowledged the importance of having someone with whom they could share their feelings during the good and the bad times.

### **9.5.3. Wider Social Networks**

Wider social networks beyond family and close friends were also important sources of support for young people. Some reported that wider social networks and contacts were beneficial in finding out information about jobs, lodgings, and education. They were also a source of financial and emotional support.

#### **NGO home**

Due to their birth identity, young people's social networks were limited. However, many of them had occasional contact with those they had met in the children's home, and at the various programmes which they attended through the NGO. Some now volunteered in the children's home, and one young woman found herself a husband through this contact. Two young people said that they received pocket money from one of the foreign visitors who used to visit the home regularly.

Herok (M16NGO) spoke about one of his school teachers who helped him to continue his studies by providing emotional support, encouragement, books and waiving tuition fees. He said:

If Nurul sir hadn't helped me, I don't think I could have continued with my studies. He consoled me by saying 'the past is past, look forward to the future'. He encouraged me to work hard, to get good grades. He told me he would do whatever was in his power to help me continue with my studies.

In addition, young people received advice from former care leavers regarding jobs and education. They were also assisted occasionally with employment issues by their mothers' associates. One young man said that he got a job through the recommendation of his mother's client.

### **Government institutions**

Young people from the government institutions had wider social networks than those from the NGO. Almost all of these young people had contacts with various groups who provided them with information about jobs, trainings, and social events. They helped to access jobs and education, as well as offering emotional help when needed.

Rana (M21NGO) got a job in a sari factory through his contact with a local politician. He said that his relationship with this politician developed through their common interest in swimming. They practised together when he was living in the institution. Rana explained:

Mamun bhai knew that I had left the Sadan. One day he asked me what I was doing; what my plans were? I told him I hadn't found a job yet. He told me he knew a factory owner and would ask if there were any vacancies. After a week Mamun bhai asked me to meet with the factory owner, which I did. I was offered a job straight away.

Young people also obtained advice, information and emotional support from other care leavers. These were either on-going or informal contacts depending on personal choice, time and circumstances. Masud (M20GB) reported receiving regular advice on various issues from an older care leaver, who sometimes invited Masud to eat with him and watch movies together. Masud said that he felt that this man was like a brother to him, giving him honest advice and trustworthy opinions, when asked.

### **Madrasah**

Young people from the madrasah developed their wider social networks mainly through mosques, religious programmes and festivals. All young people mentioned obtaining jobs through their social networks. Some of these contacts offered them free board and lodging, to help them to continue their education after leaving care.

As in the government institutions, young people in the madrasah received support from care leavers. Shaheen (M26M) reported that he had contact with many junior residents after he left care, and treated them as his younger brothers. He helped some of them by providing them with pocket money and advice when asked.

## 9.6. Discussion

This chapter has presented a diverse range of experiences of leaving care and of aftercare support. The differences were, in some situations, quite marked. UK research suggests that care leavers can be categorized as ‘moving on’, ‘survivors’ and ‘strugglers’ (Stein 2008), as discussed in Chapter Two. Findings from my study similarly identify young people who are leading independent, adult lives upon leaving institutional care; young people who are hanging on and little more; and those who are in significant difficulty. UK studies also highlight the importance of good aftercare support for young people (Ajayi and Quigley 2006; Biehal *et al.* 1995; Dixon and Stein 2005; Martin and Jackson 2002; Pinkerton and McCrea 1999; Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; Stein and Munro 2008). Four main factors emerge as contributing factors to a successful transition on leaving care in my study: firstly, the reason for leaving care; secondly, the person’s experience of stigma; thirdly, their level of preparation to join the outside world; and finally, the level and kind of support the young people were able to draw upon after leaving care.

All of the young people who took part in my study were from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and were partly in care for survival reasons, including education, safety and security. However, the ability of the young people to cope on leaving care was affected greatly by the reasons for, and circumstances of, their leaving. Although age was a major reason for leaving care, if this coincided with getting ahead in some way, it was not seen as something to be ‘afraid of’, rather it was seen as part of life’s journey. This study has shown that those young people who had come of age and left for purposes of education, employment, or starting a family life, as part of their ‘normal’ transition into independent adult life, expressed their experiences positively. Those who had been evicted, especially if they were under the leaving-age of 18 years, told a different story. Eviction increased their vulnerability, making their lives more complicated and insecure, also denying them education and other types of support necessary for future success. This disadvantaged them greatly, on top of societal discrimination due to their birth identity and care history; untimely evictions played a large part in reducing the life chances of these young people. This, of course, leads to another set of questions: about why institutions evict young people in the first place, and how they might control children better, without the threat of

eviction? These are not questions that can be categorically answered by this study, since my focus was on young people's perceptions, not the views of staff or managers in the institutions. Nevertheless, the experience of the madrasah is instructive in this regard. As already demonstrated in Chapter Eight, the madrasah had its share of unruly children, yet it was able to keep them in check and did not have an eviction policy. By living and learning alongside the children (including sharing the same sleeping rooms), teachers and young people were part of a shared 'life space' or community (Smith 2005, 2009). Madrasah staff may therefore be seen as more 'careful gardeners' in terms of preparing young people for their future lives (see Islam 2012 forthcoming; Sattar 2004), acknowledging the fact that children need 'space to make mistakes and time to grow' (Fontenin 1968:55).

This study has found that none of the institutions had any clear guidelines for preparing young people while they were in care, for leaving care. Yet the findings of this study do clearly indicate that there were strong links between a young person's level of preparation both educationally and mentally and his/her performance in the outside world, thus supporting much literature on leaving care (see Biehal *et al.* 1995; Ibrahim 2008; Dixon and Stein 2005). The study found that the educational attainment levels of young people had a direct impact on many aspects of their life including relationships with family, employment and social networks after they had left care. This study suggests that there is a strong link between educational achievement and employment opportunities. Those who managed to stick at their studies and achieve good grades, secured higher-paid jobs after they left care. This resonates with many studies in the UK (Biehal *et al.* 1995; Dixon and Stein 2005; Porter 1984; Triseliotis 1983). Educational qualifications also had an impact on family life. Some young married women were being abused by their husband or in-laws but were unable to solve the situation or dare to leave the husband due to their financial dependency upon him. As well as this, they didn't feel confident enough to secure any job because of their poor educational attainment. In contrast, other girls were able to tackle many familial problems due to the education that they had received and were content in their family life even though they continued to have issues with their care identity. The focus on education by the institutions, along with

positive adult-child relationships, proved key to preparing young people for life's knocks and challenges. It also helped to overcome the many social and economic problems which they would face in daily life due to their birth identity and poverty. The study also found that some young people from the NGO and government institutions did not face as many difficulties as others. They had acknowledged that to change societal prejudices would be difficult, and had thus taken advantage of the opportunities made available to them to develop themselves educationally and in other ways. Such individuals showed capacities for success by adopting different strategies. This confirmed that educational achievement had a positive impact on the lives of young people once they had left care, thus supporting Francis's (2000, 2008) study.

Reflecting on the life stories of the young people, I believe that the problems and difficulties which they faced were created by themselves and by others; they were in Berk's (2008) terms, both 'products' and 'producers' of their environment, since from birth, they were doomed to bear the consequences of society's prejudice. Both NGO and government care leavers suffered from a lack of self-esteem because of their care history and birth identity. Maintaining secrecy about their time in care meant huge gaps in their life story. This created in them feelings of deception and guilt (Goffman 1963), and for NGO care leavers, this was exacerbated by the fact that they were born in brothels. Furthermore, it can be argued that the resources spent on them during their time in care were, in a sense, wasted because they were prevented from putting their learning to some fruitful use within mainstream society, because of society's prejudice.

Ideally young people should have been adequately prepared before leaving care. But future success and acceptance may not be guaranteed, even with preparation. This can, often, also be the case for non-care young people who leave their family home to set up an 'independent' life. Not everyone has the same level of resilience to adjust to and tackle unknown situations. Thus having access to support mechanisms and knowing that there is somewhere one can turn and feel welcome, is important to ease a young person's difficulties and help them on the path to independence. My

study has also shown that, where possible, young people benefit from there being more fluid boundaries between the institution and their birth family and community. This was not always straightforward, however. As described, the madrasah authorities encouraged young people to retain contact with their biological families, and children went home regularly. Knowing that they were within easy reach of family and friends helped them then to settle after leaving care. But this was not the case for children in the other institutions, where contact with family was generally discouraged, especially in the NGO home, where visiting family meant visiting the brothel. The NGO home however, did encourage young people to maintain contact with the care home when they left care, and those who did well tended to be those who did so. Some even described the NGO home as their 'own home', being able to return whenever they chose. NGO staff were not able, in contrast, to visit young people themselves, because such a visit would have drawn attention to the young person's birth identity. Managing stigma and the threat of stigma was a constant for care-leavers (Goffman 1963). We have also seen, however, that there were times when a young person, although in a seemingly powerless situation, used their power to threaten in order to secure material support after leaving care. This reminds us that power is not always 'top-down' (Foucault 1972); that young people did have power and sometimes used this in ways that were experienced as negative by the institutions.

One important observation from this study is that the transitions of young women were more difficult and more constrained than those of young men. While boys were likely to go on to higher education, girls often left the institution for marriage, and in some cases, this meant a husband and in-laws who were unsupportive and, at times, abusive. Of course, this is reflective of attitudes towards gender and gender expectations and roles in Bangladesh as a whole, thus supporting Bangladeshi research findings (e.g. Akram 2004; Mahtab 2004; Rosario 2004) and in these cases, financial support alone will not be enough to solve young women's marital and familial difficulties.

## **9.7. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored young people's experiences of leaving care, the issues which they faced and the factors that enabled them to make progress. The support received from institutions, families, friends and social networks was found to be essential for wellbeing. It was clear that the skills and education which they received from care institutions were helpful in allowing them to overcome difficulties. However, it was shown that eviction was associated with many opportunities being lost and many negative outcomes, affecting nearly a third of young people in the study. Also highlighted were the continuing impact of poverty and survival issues, along with stigma, identity problems and discrimination.

UK studies (such as Pinkerton and McCrea 1999) have argued that formal institutional aftercare support is essential for positive outcomes for young people. My study supports this view, but also acknowledges that aftercare support is only ever available to those whose care-leaving is planned. For all others, families, friends and social networks had to carry out this role instead, without which young people would have found their life's journey even more fraught with difficulties. Finally, I have drawn attention to the value of institutions offering contact and support to young people long after they have left care, particularly necessary in situations where family support is not available.

### Key Findings and Implications for Policy and Practice

#### 10.1. Introduction

This chapter closes the thesis. It begins with the strengths and limitations of the study, and then discusses key findings from the research. It goes on to revisit the main theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter Two, adding new ideas that emerged through the findings. Recommendations are put forward to help reframe residential childcare policy and practice implications. Further possible research areas in the field are identified before conclusion.

#### 10.2. Looking Back: Methodological Reflections

The aim of this study, as outlined in Chapter one, was to explore the experiences of leaving care from the perspectives of young people who have lived in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh. My objectives focused on investigating young people's experiences across four different residential childcare institutions, examining the relationship between young people's present lives and their care experiences, and developing an understanding of the practices employed by the institutions in preparing young people for leaving care. I hoped that my study might contribute to improving provision for young people in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh, and in other comparable majority world countries, as well as globally. As in all research, there were strengths and limitations in the study.

##### 10.2.1. Strengths in the Study

One of the main strengths in this study was my own knowledge and experience over 16 years of working with children in residential settings in Bangladesh. My 'insider' status (as discussed in Chapter Four) helped me to frame the questions in the study and opened doors to research sites, as well as allowing me to understand and analyse my findings more fully. There are, of course, also drawbacks to being an insider and these will be reviewed again in 10.2.2.

The methodology chosen for the study was another strength in the research. By combining interviews with participant observation, I was able to access young people's views and at the same time, build a picture of the background context within which to place their experiences. The priority given to young people's accounts in the presentation of findings and analysis demonstrates my overall aim to foreground their voices in this research.

I believe that the time that I spent at the various institutions was of tremendous value. My field observations enabled me to understand young people's experiences from their own perspectives. I was able to compare and contrast young people's experiences of different care institutions, thus enabling me to re-conceptualize the meaning given to care, leaving care and aftercare. In addition, by comparing three different types of institution, I will be able to make observations which, I hope, will inform childcare policy and practice in Bangladesh in the future, and also offer insight into residential childcare more generally. Evidence from three very different types of institution may enable policy-makers and practitioners to find suitable policies and practices to implement, as well as opening doors to new research and developments in residential childcare in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

### **10.2.2. Limitations of the Study**

My research findings have captured significant aspects of young people's in-care, leaving care and aftercare experiences. Nevertheless, being an 'insider', as explored in Chapter 4, also brings limitations. There may be aspects of the subject that I was not able to see, or which I took for granted, as someone who had grown up in the country and had worked in the field. This is inevitable; there is no such thing as unbiased, totally neutral research, as pointed out in an early study by Becker (1967). Moreover, interpersonal relationships (such as those with contacts in the research field) always have an impact on research (Coffey 1999). It was important that I maintained a critical eye at all times, and sought to question what I was seeing and doing.

Another limitation in my study was the nature and number of young people who took part in the research. I contacted 115 young people in total and eventually interviewed 33 young people. This is a relatively small number, so it would seem unwise to try to generalize the findings of my study to a wider population. Moreover, I was only able to access young people who were willing to talk to me; this means that I have nothing to say about those who refused to take part, or who were not part of the original study sites. Nevertheless, it is significant that the research informants came from a range of institutional backgrounds: they had left care from one of four institutions of three types in Bangladesh, suggesting that there is representativeness and diversity within the sample. Furthermore, I would be surprised if my findings were very different if the sample size and make-up were changed. This is because Bangladeshi culture, religious beliefs and socio-economic conditions tend to be relatively homogenous, so that similar stories are likely to be repeated throughout the country. Having said this, my objective was never to generalize the experiences of these young people or to test any hypothesis. Rather it was to understand and explore the preparation and leaving care experiences of this specific group of young people.

### **10.3. Key Findings**

The main finding in this research is that time spent in residential childcare in Bangladesh was, on the whole, a positive experience for this group of young people, giving them opportunities for education, healthcare, relationships and social networks that they would not have had otherwise; after leaving care, their life chances of jobs, higher education and marriage and family life were improved as a direct consequence of this. This is in contrast to the research conducted in the UK and other developed countries which has highlighted negative outcomes for 'looked after' children (Biehal *et al.* 1995; Dixon and Stein 2005; Mendes and Moslehuddin 2004; Porter 1984; Stein 1999 and 2002). My findings also differ from studies conducted by some international NGOs in developing countries that portray residential childcare as detrimental and damaging for children (Jayathilake and Harini 2005; Lalzallana 2008; Martin and Sudrajat 2007; Tolfree 2005; UNICEF 2008). There are other aspects of my study, however, which are much more in tune with existing childcare research. For example, my findings have confirmed the importance of attachment and relationships in ensuring that young people's

experience is a positive one (Bowlby 1951; Howe 2000; Tizard 1986; Schofield *et al.* 2000), as well as the negative consequences of stigma and social discrimination on young people's lives (Elmer 2005; Goffman 1968; Kroger 2003; Triseliotis 1973). Interestingly, the research has drawn attention to the reality that for some young people, material benefits (such as good food and clothing) may be less significant to their developing a sense of self and well-being than religious belief and spiritual guidance; the young people who had a religious upbringing did especially well in terms of education and careers in the future. The group who fared least well across the board were those who had been evicted from their institutions. The main findings from across the four findings chapters are presented next.

### **10.3.1. Experiences of Education**

The study found that, overall, the young people in the study valued education and acknowledged that their institutions had played a positive role in their education, unlike experiences from research in the UK (Ajayi and Quigley 2006; Berridge and Brodie 1998; Biehal *et al.* 1995; Dixon and Stein 2005; Fletcher-Campbell 1998; Francis 2008; Hayden *et al.* 1997; Jackson and Sachdev 2001; Martin and Jackson 2002; Stein 1994; Rutter 2000). The young people who achieved most educationally were those who remained in care for a long period of time – a number of years. This is in marked contrast to research carried out in the UK (Chakrabarti and Hill 2000; Sinclair and Gibbs 1996) where it was found that poor educational outcomes of children were associated with longer periods of stay in care institutions. Those whose care was disrupted (critically, through eviction) fared worst educationally. Moreover, a poor education impacted negatively on life chances as a whole. The madrasah education system, although narrowly-focused, was found to result in good outcomes for most young people, in terms of jobs as well as social acceptance.

No evidence was found from this study to show that educationally enriching environments, for example, a quiet or private place to study or having access to better quality educational resources produced better educational outcomes. Rather, it was found that increased material support seemed to contribute little to educational success, thus differing from findings of UK research (Berridge and Brodie 1998; Harker *et al.* 2005). Most children who did well educationally pointed to the

importance of a quality relationship with a significant adult who cared about them; they understood that this was vital for their success, thus supporting other studies (Aldgate and McIntosh 2006; Cashmore *et al.* 2007; Dixon and Stein 2005; Francis 2008; Jackson and Sachdev 2001). Moreover, low expectations (and sometimes too high expectations) and lack of care and guidance were found to impact negatively on young people's educational success. As well as young people's own attitude, a sense of determination, confidence and commitment were found to be important factors for educational success. Finally, young people from the NGO home and government institutions suffered significantly in terms of stigma and social discrimination because of their birth identity, care history and mothers' profession (as a sex worker), which all adversely affected their educational outcomes.

### **10.3.2. Experiences of Healthcare**

The study highlighted that healthcare practices in the institutions varied due to policy, funding and beliefs. Furthermore, management of the institutions and staff attitudes had a direct influence on healthcare practices. The study found that children from the madrasah were certainly happier and appeared healthier than their counterparts in the other institutions, even though they lacked medical facilities. The study also identified that the quality and quantity of food mattered less to the young people than we might have anticipated; instead, 'spiritual food' was also found to be significant for some young people, especially those living in the madrasah. This is supported by a number of studies (Bergin 1983; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Koenig 1997) that found that a strong faith in God or a benevolent spiritual entity contributes to good physical and mental health. Relationships with staff and other peers were critical again, as was contact with birth families, in order to keep children well, physically and mentally. Finally, the study suggests that medical treatment and nutritious food are not the only things necessary for health and wellbeing, rather a number of factors are interrelated to promote wellness in a person: emotional health, mental health, healthy social relationships, safety and security, encouragement and interdependency, and most importantly, spirituality and religious beliefs.

### **10.3.3. Experiences of Personal Relationship, Identity and Social Networks**

The study noted the importance of friendships with peers for developing confidence and wellbeing, self-esteem and resilience. Friendships made while in care were often continued after leaving care. This was also the case for relationships with adults, and young people said that they appreciated greatly the continuing concern of a staff member long after they had left the institution. They also, however, welcomed continuing contact with family members and the wider community. It should be remembered that the majority of children in all the institutions were not orphans or without families. Rather, parents had placed their children in residential care for a number of reasons (especially poverty, education, religion and safety), and a large number of children returned to their families after leaving care. My findings demonstrated that regular family contact contributed to young people's positive outcomes, thus agreeing with Frost *et al.* (1999) who argue that those young people who retain good family links are better able to create and maintain social networks in the longer term. For them, the certainty of having family provided self-esteem, confidence and assertiveness, thus promoting resilience in them. This study has shown that resilient young people did better educationally, had the ability to ignore past discriminatory experiences, were able to develop social networks outside the care institutions and could easily overcome life's knocks. They were better able to cope with the world outside of the institution and to do so much more easily than their counterparts. They managed to develop a positive self-image image of the world and their part in it, supporting previously conducted research (e.g. Borge 1996; Dziech and Hawkins 1998; Fowler 1996; Garmezy 1993; Gilligan 1999; 2005; 2012; Quinn 1995; Rutter 1984; 1990; Sinclair and Gibbs 1996).

Interestingly, there was no evidence from this study that a smaller unit produced better outcomes for children, or that a smaller unit was more likely to lead to better quality attachments for young people. On the contrary, this study has shown that in larger institutions, where more residents were able to get to know more people, having multiple attachments was even more beneficial; children and young people turned to each other for support, and in doing so, they were able to build stronger relationships and to develop greater social skills. They also learned to become more

independent and so were, arguably, better prepared for life beyond the institution. Staff continuity, at the same time, seemed less important to young people than staff attitudes; hence a relatively new staff member might readily become a ‘special person’, because young people were able to build relationships quickly. The study has shown that extra-curricular activities were helpful in allowing children and young people to have positive experiences and so build resilience that helped young people to cope in the real world after they left care. Stigma around birth identity and care history, and social discrimination, on the other hand, were found to be barriers for success, as supported by Ibrahim’s (2010) study of Jordanian care leavers.

#### **10.3.4. Experiences of Transition, Leaving Care and Aftercare Support**

The study found that support for care-leavers matters in Bangladesh, just as has been demonstrated in many earlier UK studies (Ajayi and Quigley 2006; Biehal *et al.* 1995; Biehal and Wade 1999; Dixon and Stein 2005; Martin and Jackson 2002; Pinkerton and McCrea 1999; Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; Stein 2002; Stein and Munro 2008). Those who were evicted early from institutional care were highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (through gangsterism and prostitution, etc.); their educational and healthcare outcomes were much reduced and their life chances diminished. Supporting young people beyond care was not, however, found to be easy for some institutions, not least because young people may not wish to be identified as care-leavers because of the stigma attached to both birth identity and care itself. Madrasah young people, who received no formal preparation for leaving care (as it is understood in the UK) and no formal support after care, nevertheless did best in the world beyond the institution. This reminds us that having formal procedures in place may be less important than informal supports from family and social networks; also that the impact of stigma (of birth and care identity) may be difficult to overcome, no matter how much willingness there is on the part of institutions to support young people who leave care. My study also confirms that young people’s social integration is much more effective if society understands the problems faced by such young people after leaving care, and thus takes some responsibility for supporting them in integrating and being included. Nevertheless, the study has shown that institutions have a key role to play in continuing to support

young people after care, especially when there is little or no family support mechanism available.

## **10.4. Theories Revisited**

### **10.4.1. Children and Childhood**

On the basis of my findings, I would like to reiterate that childhood in Bangladesh is very different to childhood in a minority world context like the UK, and as a result, experiences of residential childcare will also be different. Moreover, there is no single experience of being in-care or aftercare in Bangladesh; experiences differ across and within institutions, and across and within Bangladeshi society. We have seen that madrasah young people have a very different perspective on life from those in the other care settings; that boys' and girls' experiences are hugely different; and that children whose mothers work as sex-workers are burdened by stigma and discrimination. There is, therefore no single childhood, even in Bangladesh. This mirrors recent writing on the sociology of childhood, which argues that we need to re-think this in terms of 'multiple childhoods' (Bissell 2000; Onta-Bhatta 2001).

### **10.4.2. Needs and Rights of Children**

My study has suggested that children may have more 'needs' than 'rights' in a developing world context like Bangladesh; their whole reason for coming into care in the first place is based on their needs for shelter, as well as their needs for education and healthcare. 'Rights' may play little part in this, although the language of rights has become familiar within some residential childcare settings, most especially the NGO sector. Children's rights are not, of course, neutral; 'Western' concepts like this can, at times, be critical of other value-systems, such as those demonstrated in the madrasah. This connects with Emond's (2008: 193) view that we need to move beyond current rights discourses, and instead foreground the importance of 'love, respect, security, trust, reliability and responsiveness' in residential childcare.

I must acknowledge that 'needs' and 'rights' are very slippery concepts; there is little agreement amongst experts as to what constitutes a 'need' and this makes it difficult to make any substantive claims about this. Nevertheless, my study has shown that

children have needs other than simply physical and emotional needs, and that residential childcare settings should, in the future, pay greater attention to children and young people's cultural and religious needs, including their need for spiritual guidance (see Furness and Gilligan 2010). The whole area of 'needs' and 'rights' in a majority world context merits further analysis, and this is one area that I intend to continue to consider in future writing and research.

#### **10.4.3. Attachment and Resilience**

My study demonstrates that attachment, as psychological literature over many years has proposed, is vital for young people's personal development (Howe 2000); young people who had good attachment with at least one significant adult did well, both during and after care. Resilience was also found to be important, and, as the wider literature suggests, was a complex mix of personal, interpersonal and social factors; having good experiences (through education, extra-curricular activities etc.) helped to build resilience, as did good relationships, and good outcomes in one aspect of life tended to lead to better outcomes in another.

However, my study has shown that, contrary to the findings of early psychological literature, having multiple attachments with different adults is not necessarily negative; such attachments may mean that young people are able to develop even greater skills and resilience. This connects with recent writing which suggests that attachment can occur with anybody and at any age (Schofield *et al.* 2000 and Taylor 2006). My study has also shown that attachment may develop between young people and the whole institution, not just to an individual or individuals within it. This suggests the value of adopting a more social (and less individual) understanding of attachment, mirroring ideas by Smith (2009) and Smith *et al.* (2012) about the importance of conceptualising the institution as a 'community'. Similarly, a key message to emerge from this discussion is that residential care, like family care, should provide an appropriate range of experiences to enable growing children to take their place in the adult world. This means that in order to build resilience, we need to find appropriate ways to meet the emotional, physical, educational, social and spiritual needs of children. This, of course, connects with ecological systems theory (below).

#### **10.4.4. Ecological Systems Theory**

This study has demonstrated the usefulness of a systems approach that locates children in the context of their families, communities and society. Whilst ecological models have been criticised by some researchers (see Chapter Two), I believe along with Aldgate (2006) that this way of thinking about young people's lives offers a holistic approach that makes sense in my study. The ecological systems approach suggests that instead of focusing on children as individuals, we need to see them in a wider context; it is only then that we can fully understand the value of community networks on the one hand, and the negative impact of stigma and social discrimination on the other. Family and community contacts enabled children in my study to participate in many activities and build positive links with neighbours. This helped transition, by enabling them to make contacts, which might lead to further education, jobs, accommodation, or even marriage. This suggests that for any successful and useful programme to be developed, policy-makers should seek to promote integration of their young people into the community during and after their time in care.

#### **10.4.5. Stigma and Social Discrimination**

Although theories of stigma and social discrimination were not part of the original literature review, both emerged very strongly in my research findings, and provided a way of understanding the adverse outcomes experienced by young people. Stigma and social discrimination were also found to be powerfully connected to another concept, that is, identity. The research has shown that for the children of sex workers, and for care-leavers more generally, their experience was one of 'spoiled identity', first described by Goffman (1963) in his ground-breaking research. The young people had to hide their 'authentic' identities, denying their families and their communities, and the everyday acts of secrecy and denial brought with them shame and insecurity, and impacted on their ability to build self-confidence, social networks and resilience. Madrasah young people were much more fortunate, in contrast, and grew up proud of their heritage and their identity, even when they were poor or orphans, because society accepted them and valued them as 'madrasah children'.

## **10.5. Implications for Policy**

I began this research expecting to be able to make firm recommendations for residential childcare, especially as regards young people's preparation for leaving care, and for their aftercare. I now end the research with a much more cautious set of ideas which demonstrate the importance of giving value to different approaches and locating these in the social and political context of Bangladesh.

### **10.5.1. Recognising the Importance of Residential Childcare**

The Bangladeshi government must recognise the importance of residential childcare for those who need it, and put existing policies properly in place to improve facilities which will impact on the lives of young people. The government could create an umbrella body to deal with all residential children institutions, whether government, NGO or madrasah. Such a body would have the task of improving accountability and ensuring that the best practice from each type of institutions was used in the others. Young people did acknowledge the importance of care institutions, stating that their care institution played a significant and positive role in their lives, but said they wanted to see changes in the attitudes of staff towards children. They wanted staff to perform their duties with more care and responsibility, and wanted to be understood by the care authorities, and not blamed for staff failures. They wanted staff expectations towards children to be more positive, and felt a change in current policy and practice was needed so that young people could participate more in planning for their own lives. They also wished to have someone in authority who would listen to them and work on issues that affected them, with a view to making positive changes for people like them in society. More importantly, perhaps, they wanted a policy that prevented evictions for minor misdemeanours and supported positive integration in society after leaving care.

### **10.5.2. Consistency Across Institutions**

This study has shown that there are marked differences across residential care institutions in Bangladesh. Currently, many NGO homes and Qaumi madrasahs are not directly accountable to the government; although the Bangladeshi government has produced an operations manual for government childcare institutions, this has not been implemented by NGOs or religious organisations. But even with a manual in

place, practices in government-run institutions were found to be far from exemplary, particularly in relation to the practice of evicting children. This suggests that the Bangladeshi government should reframe its existing childcare policies and develop new policies to support all types of residential childcare organisations, respecting religious and cultural beliefs. It may also be helpful to have a single monitoring agency to inspect childcare residential institutions as a way of ensuring that good enough standards are maintained.

### **10.5.3. Reframing Policies**

But how could this be achieved? There is no easy solution, but my study has drawn attention to a number of areas that are key to young people's success: education, health (including spiritual health and well-being) and extra-curricular activities were all seen as important, as were relationships both inside and outside the institutions (with staff, peers, families of origin and the wider community). If residential childcare in Bangladesh can be built around these principles, then I believe that the outcomes for children and young people will be better.

The study has also drawn attention to the huge disparities for young people on leaving their institutions: those who had been evicted or left early had many fewer positive outcomes than those who had left in a planned way with the support of their institution (NGO home or government-led) or the backing of the community (the madrasah children). This suggests that policies need to be put in place for dealing better with issues of behaviour-management, so that eviction becomes a last, not first resort for institutions. There should also be greater attention given to what happens on leaving care, for example, through the provision of grants to allow students to study, and apprenticeships for those who are so inclined; the interviewees from NGO and government institutions in my study were clear that they had done better than their friends because they had been able to make use of their education and skills training. Such individuals showed capacities for success by adapting different strategies, supporting Masten and Coatsworth's (1998) study.

My research has shown that despite Bangladesh being one of the first signatory countries of the UNCRC, and having many NGOs working on children's rights

issues over many years, there is very little knowledge and understanding of the idea of 'children's rights', amongst both adults and children. It is interesting to reflect on this further and to ask: would the introduction of a 'children's rights' perspective improve residential childcare in Bangladesh? I am not sure about this now, given the evidence of my own study, where it seemed that the happiest and most successful young people (the madrasah young people) were brought up with little idea of 'children's rights' as they are understood in the minority world. Moreover, I have suggested that the very idea of individual 'rights' is at odds with the more social understanding of what it is to be human in a country like Bangladesh. But I still believe that young people benefit from an opportunity to be involved in activities that promote decision-making and build independence, and that the introduction of a children's rights perspective may help to contribute to this, especially in the secular institutions which do not rely on a religious framework to organise their activities.

#### **10.5.4. Increased Staff Training**

Looking after children and substitute parenting are a complex task which requires various roles to be performed effectively: mentor, teacher, administrator, first-aider, counsellor, and most importantly, being an authoritative but sympathetic parent-like figure. Adequate resources need to be put in place to offer training to staff on skills development. Staff need cultural awareness to improve services, for example, young people from the brothel have a very different attitude and outlook on life and the outside world than those living with parents, and types of 'father-figure' needed will be completely different. As well as this, ideas about education, health and hygiene, and food habits will be different. Staff need to be trained to understand and acknowledge this.

They must also be trained so that they no longer treat those in care less favourably than their own children. Staff training needs to be given to highlight this issue, with a view to making staff aware of how their behaviour makes young people feel neglected and discriminated against. Staff should also receive training in the negative impact of stigma and social discrimination, so that they can counter their own attitudes and also support young people better.

### **10.5.5. Increased Emphasis on Community and Family Integration**

New approaches are needed to involve the community, both to develop their understanding about residential childcare practice, and to increase sympathy and respect for the children in care. For this to happen, programmes should be developed so that young people have free and open access to participate in community programmes. Through community participation, relationships will be built to encourage community and societal attitudes to change over time. In addition, young people will come to appreciate their local community practices, culture and traditions, so as to develop their social skills, self-esteem and morale before leaving care.

There also needs to be better contact between birth families and young people in care. Families need to be encouraged to visit the institutions on a regular basis, and parents should be able to talk to staff about their children's progress whenever they choose. Since family members' financial situation or distance from the care home made it hard for them to visit, provision could be made to reimburse transport costs, at least for the very poor. Accommodation could be offered to those coming from a distance. Institutions should also have flexible rules regarding children visiting their families, since it was found in this study that frequent visits to family appeared to encourage and motivate children more. Improved relationships between young people, parents and staff would benefit young people greatly, allowing for decisions about their present and future to be reached jointly.

### **10.5.6. Guidance and Support**

This study has confirmed the important of attachment to an adult figure or figures for all young people. When this is not available from a family member, there needs to be other ways of achieving this. Regular guidance from an identified individual would provide necessary support while in care and enable young people to learn better skills of independence, while also allowing early recognition of problems that might lead to eviction. Support should be continued until they have begun to settle into adult life.

### **10.5.7. Promoting Public Awareness**

At present in Bangladesh, prejudice and discrimination towards children of sex workers, and all children from residential care, are rife. Awareness-raising to reduce stigma should be led by the government with support from other agencies, including academics, pressure groups, the media and politicians. Care institutions could take the initiative in creating educational material for the public, media personnel, law-enforcement agencies, health and education professionals, since they deal with such issues on a daily basis, and hence have more understanding of them than others. In Bangladesh, radio and television is becoming an effective way of reaching all levels of society. The voice media are particularly useful in a society where large numbers of the population are still illiterate or semi-literate, and can also be a good way to stimulate public debate and attract the attention of politicians (Black 2002). Quality programmes on this issue need to be produced. Newspapers can also play a significant role in sensitising people to issues of fairness and justice. Community theatre and street dramas have always been popular forms of awareness-raising in 'semi-literate' societies. Hence supporting NGOs that use such creative tools should be supported. Moreover, public rallies, discussion groups, seminars, peer education, billboards, booklets and fact sheets are also effective tools in educating society.

I am aware that change will not occur overnight. However, a move towards awareness-raising and sensitising needs to take place sooner rather than later. Consultation between people from various walks of life needs to take place to help develop a robust policy. Young people themselves can be part of the awareness-raising, influencing policy and practice. Work has begun, but for radical change there needs to be joined-up action at local, regional, national and international levels.

### **10.6. Implications for Practice**

It is not sufficient to work on policy issues alone. Good practice also needs to be recognised and encouraged, and again, my recommendations draw from what I see as best practice from my research and reading from both minority and majority worlds. Some of the recommendations offered here have resource implications which may be difficult to meet immediately, given the political, economic and financial climate. Others are suggestive of changes in mindset and emphasis, which may not

necessarily require a large input of resources but do indicate the need for a new way of thinking about residential childcare practice in the future.

### **10.6.1. Staff Training**

Staff need training to do their jobs effectively. Opportunities to learn and create mutual learning environments are important for all staff. Training workshops would enable staff to learn from each other, and see the 'bigger picture' of their decision-making (e.g. in relation to evictions), and the implications which their decisions have for children's lives. This does not necessarily mean a huge investment in external training events; rather these can be organised 'in house' to allow staff to reflect on their daily practice. Staff would also benefit from more formal opportunities to study theories around child development, mental health, puberty problems, as well as effective communication. Any training should take account of the social, cultural and religious aspects of children's lives.

### **10.6.2. Encouraging Education**

My study, alongside many others, has shown that education, both formal and informal, is a principal tool for future success and independence for young people. For this reason, it must be encouraged and supported. Greater priority should therefore be given to educational development, whether academic or vocational. Regular school attendance should be assumed, promoted and enforced. This can be achieved in both soft and hard ways, by supporting attendance and, where necessary, offering rewards or punishments. Children and young people should also be given financial support (where this is required) to enable them to carry on with their studies beyond the minimum school leaving age and into formal and informal training. Children in care should also be given maximum encouragement to participate in school and out-of-school activities. The introduction of child-friendly extra-curricular activities could stimulate students' desire to learn and attend school, thus reducing absenteeism and enhancing academic performance. When extra-curricular activities take place at schools outside the home, this will provide the 'care' children with the opportunities to mix with the parents of 'non-care' children, thus promoting acceptance and integration. Again, this is not necessarily an expensive recommendation, and is one which could be easily implemented.

### **10.6.3. Giving 'Voice' to Young People**

Giving 'voice' to young people is a significant issue and needs to be looked at carefully. Traditionally, children and young people in Bangladesh have very little power, but nevertheless, my findings emphasize that children want to be given a 'voice' to express what they need, and how they feel about the choices society makes on their behalf. I believe that it should be possible to ensure that older young people in care do have an opportunity to participate in policy development and daily practices in care institutions. For example, institutions could delegate some of their activities to young people, so as to give them a sense of responsibility and increased self-esteem. Through participation, young people will understand better how the care system operates, and may be able to suggest new ways of managing it which will help to re-conceptualise and reframe care policy and practice. Provision should be made to encourage staff and other professionals to listen to young people with sincere and open hearts, not fearing to accept constructive criticism of the care system put forward. I believe children and young people's voices can be heard in the Bangladeshi care context, if the will is there.

### **10.6.4. Alternatives to Eviction**

My study has shown that those who were evicted suffered the most. They were not given opportunities to correct their actions, and no alternative means of support were apparent, at any level. It is my firm conviction that, not only is eviction a negative experience for young people, but most evictions were preventable. I would hope that in future, with adequate support and supervision, young people could be listened to 'with heart' by staff and given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that affect their future wellbeing, thus eliminating the need for damaging practices such as eviction.

### **10.6.5. Management of Residential Settings**

I have already identified that government institutions have a relatively well-developed operations manual. This is not enough on its own, however. They also need good managers to run the institutions, and good systems for overseeing the management and administration processes (Hicks *et al.* 2007; Morgan 2000). Although the government institutions in my study had committees made up of

members from different government departments, including the District Deputy Commissioner, in practice, the committees did not meet. Senior officers from the Social Welfare Department hardly ever visited care institutes, and appeared to know very little about what was happening to the children living in them. In the NGO home in this study, staff turnover was high, whereas staff in the government institutions and madrasah staff stayed for years. This, in my view, needs further investigation. Management needs to encourage good staff, retrain poorly performing staff (Clough 2000; Whitaker *et al.* 1998), and be more ready to sack the worst staff. On the other hand, staff need to feel confident to take decisions independently, to be treated with more respect, and to be provided with better remuneration (Sinclair and Gibbs 1998; Hicks *et al.* 2007; Osborne 1992; Whitaker *et al.* 1998) to improve their job status.

#### **10.6.6. Networking of Care Leavers**

Young people who have left care could be supported to set up organisations of their own with aid from government bodies, and national and international NGOs. Programmes could be developed that could work on the development of policy and practice for those still in care, and as well as those who have left care. These organisations could be a useful platform providing a voice to all children who grow up in institutions. They could also promote networking with agencies that support young people, such as technical and vocational colleges, educational establishments, and job centres. Indirectly, these agencies could evaluate practice and look out for institutional irregularities which are not helpful for the development of residents. They could then raise issues of concern at national and international forums, putting pressure on the government to make changes as and when necessary, through developing and updating policy and practice.

#### **10.6.7. Sharing Good Practice among Institutions**

It is essential that staff from all institutions be given opportunities to visit each other to understand other systems and processes. Exchanging ideas and trouble-shooting are good ways to develop better outcome-oriented care institutions. The government's Social Welfare Department could play a vital role closing the gaps between the NGO, government and community-run institutions, by acting as

coordinator and by demanding cooperation and the sharing of best practices. An umbrella role for government would also create opportunities for other child welfare institutions and NGOs to get involved in childcare. This could lead to a mutual interest of learning and support, in the best interests of young people, irrespective of institutional background. By working together, the social welfare department and NGO donor agencies could reach significantly more marginalised young people in society. We can also learn from the experiences of other countries. The fundamental principal, I believe, is to ‘think big while starting small’ within one’s own domain, and by learning from others.

## **10.7. Implications for Research**

The experiences that I have gained in completing this study have been most valuable. I have found that a number of areas would benefit from further research to understand young people and residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh. The first is broadly theoretical; the second more methodological in orientation.

### **10.7.1. Theoretical Concepts**

I have already identified that ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ are concepts that require further analysis in a majority world context. I have argued that the children in my study had more needs than rights; also that spiritual needs are important for young people’s overall development as human beings. I intend to do further reading and writing about needs and rights to try to address the question of whether one is indeed more important than the other or, rather, whether both should be understood as complementary.

In this study, madrasah children fared well on the whole and society’s attitudes towards those living in the madrasah was much more positive than those living in NGO and government institutions, even though some madrasah children may have been illegitimate. A study could be conducted to find out how society views religion; is it a great purifier for all social ills? Does society feel it has moral responsibility towards those who live in madrasahs?

### **10.7.2. Methodological Studies**

There are a number of ways in which this research could be taken forward in more studies in the future.

Firstly, my study has been from the children's perspective. It would be interesting to research institutional care from the perspective of staff and senior officials making policy. Another area of special importance is societal attitudes towards residential childcare institutions and their residents.

Secondly, a study of high achievers and their eventual outcome would be interesting. Was the investment made by care institutions in their higher education worthwhile? Does society give opportunities to gifted individuals irrespective of their birth identity?

Thirdly, more in-depth study needs to be undertaken to understand the reasons for young people's eviction from institutions, life after care for evicted young people, and on any existing programmes to provide continuing support and guidance after eviction. From this, policies and practices can be developed to avoid eviction and to improve outcomes.

Fourthly, a study into what happens to young women when they leave care would be useful: why are some young women forced to hide their birth and care identities from prospective in-laws, and continue to do so after marriage? Further studies with this specific group of care leavers, looking at their marital life-experiences, would be instructive in understanding in greater detail the impact that care and birth identity has had on their marital lives.

Fifthly, my study has provided an understanding of young people's views and experiences at one point in time. This could be the foundation for cohort-based longitudinal studies for further exploration of different aspects of residential childcare and young people, both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Finally, this study has confirmed that the lives of young people in the residential childcare system, and after leaving care, are hugely influenced by society's religious beliefs and cultural practices. It would be interesting to conduct comparative studies in other countries where religious and cultural influences on residential childcare systems are similarly strong. Cultural comparisons could be made with other South Asian countries, while religious comparisons could be made with Muslim majority countries.

### **10.8. Conclusion**

The findings presented in this thesis present the voices of a group of young adults who had spent a significant part of their lives living in care institutions. They talked about their experiences of care, leaving care, and aftercare support. Whilst many had positive stories to tell, there were also a great many accounts of hardship, difficulty and discrimination during and after care. The findings point to major recommendations in relation to policy (around eviction, for example) and practice (around the need for continuing contact with families and communities). They also indicate a large number of possibilities for future research in this area. I would like to end this thesis by quoting Runa (NGO19F), who summed up the care system as follows:

If their [the home's] aim is to give shape to our lives and to establish us in society, then why do they force us to leave the home for a simple mistake? Why do they disappear halfway through our lives? ...They [the authorities] have good intentions of supporting us, I believe, which is why they spend money on us. Yet the way they try to reach their aim is not good. They [the practitioners] need to respect our opinions, believe in us, encourage and guide us. More importantly, they need to treat us like their [staff] own kids, otherwise they will not get good results and we, the children, will not benefit.

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## **APPENDIX: 1**

### **Approaching the Organisations and Social Welfare Department**

#### **NGO home**

I approached the Executive Director in order to obtain access into the NGO-run children's home, with a view to involving his staff, as well as young people who had left their care. I took an opportunistic approach and hoped that, since I was an ex-employee of the NGO, permission would be granted without difficulty. I felt that the NGO home would be a good starting point as it was a world known to me.

I explained the objectives of my research and requested permission to involve children's home staff along with those young people who had left care. I was careful to differentiate my role as researcher from the role of Assistant Director that I still hold, to avoid any work-related expectations of me. I was granted verbal permission and encouraged to complete my research quickly, so that I would return to my duties and implement my findings. I was offered a private room with IT, telephone and other facilities.

#### **Government institutions**

Next I needed permission from the Social Welfare Department to involve their institutions and staff. Bearing in mind my earlier telephone conversations with government officials, I tried to approach them sensitively, as I did not want bureaucracy to obstruct my research. My involvement with an NGO and a foreign university, along with the country's volatile political situation, meant that I could be seen as a potential threat by some in the department.

I was not sure whether to follow a top-down or bottom-up approach with the government institutions. Usually in Bangladesh, the top-down approach works better than the bottom-up approach where there is the risk of obstruction or procrastination. I knew also that failing to obtain permission from the Director General would be catastrophic for my study, since one third of my research involved government institutions. In addition, if he refused my application other doors could close and perhaps nobody would be able to say yes. After much thought, I decided to find out if there were any links closer to the Director General and Deputy Director of the Social Welfare in my research area. I discovered that my uncle was the Director General's line manager, that the Director General held a similar political ideology to me, and that Social Welfare Assistant Director of my research area was a friend of my Executive Director.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of both the top-down and bottom-up approaches, I decided to first meet the Director General to ask for support, and then to ask my NGO Executive Director to persuade the Assistant Director to help me.

Arranging a meeting with the Director General took many weeks and involved every connection I could muster. I began by speaking with him in person at a workshop I was invited to by Save the Children UK (Bangladesh), where the Director General was speaking. Then I asked my uncle to arrange a formal meeting, which was successful.

In the second stage, my Executive Director arranged for me to meet with the Assistant Director. I met with him and explained my research aims and objectives, the people I intended to involve, my time-frame and my expectations of him. He asked me about my personal interest in the matter and what I hoped the end result would be, including any publications of results. He related how biased the media was towards their services, saying 'the media people are blind, they don't see the difficulties we are facing, they don't know the inside story of the institutions, they are hasty and dirty writers, happy to make hot news

without realising the impact of their reports'. In addition to media concerns, he also expressed worries about the financial difficulties of the department and the political difficulties of granting me access.

I gave him a written application requesting permission to access the government institutions, use their documents and involve their staff in my research, and a summary of my research proposal. After reading my summary, he acknowledged that I was doing an interesting, challenging and valuable piece of research that would benefit Bangladesh. He stated that he had a moral obligation to help and support me, but that I would need the Deputy Director's permission as well.

He immediately went to the Deputy Director's room to discuss the matter. After some initial concern, I realised that the Deputy Director would not present a problem as she was the Assistant Director's wife and they both worked in the same office! He came back fairly quickly and told me that she was happy to allow me to work in the institutions. I assured the Assistant Director that all participants would be kept anonymous, and that nothing would be published in Bengali newspapers.

My application was forwarded to the superintendents of the institutions, with a note stating that it had been approved, ordering staff to support me as necessary. I was given a copy of the application (Appendix 2) and told to meet with the superintendents.

### **Madrasah**

The madrasah should have been the easiest building to access, being part of a mosque, open for all worshippers. However, after several days of investigation and taking consideration of the country's political unrest with reports that extremist groups were being formed in the Quami madrasahs, I decided to approach the superintendent rather than the management committee. Initially I met the deputy superintendent, the Head of the Hifz-Khana (a section of the madrasah devoted to memorization of the Holy Qur'an) and the president of the madrasah. The president was keen for me to carry out my research. With the president's verbal permission, I approached the superintendents.

### **Negotiations with the Managers and the Staff**

Continuing the top-down approach, having obtained official permission from the higher authorities, I then went to meet with the managers of the institutions.

### **NGO home**

After gaining verbal permission from the Executive Director, I planned a visit to the children's home. On my way there I wondered how the staff and children would accept me, whether I would be able to put aside my previous role of Assistant Director, and whether I would be able to examine the children's home with 'new eyes'. Was I really able to change my attitude towards the staff and children?

When I entered the home's compound there were a few children playing near the office premises. They knew me as the Head of Programmes. A couple of girls came and greeted me. A crowd slowly gathered and much time was spent catching up and satisfying the natural curiosity of the children. I received much news: who had left, who had been expelled, who had got married and what the home had done to support their marriage ceremony, how they had enjoyed it and who cried; how many national and international visitors had been to the home in the past year; how many cultural shows had been performed; which teachers had left; why the high school children were taking their classes inside the home; why they had to stop going to the community school, and many more things. A number of my research questions were answered during this gathering.

I went to the office, (re)introduced myself to the teachers, and briefed them with the aims of my research and my role as a researcher. I informed them that I had received permission to work with the young people and staff from the Executive Director, and that I would have no work responsibilities towards the organisation during my research period. The acting principal and staff assured me that they would help as much as they could.

### **Government institutions**

As girls and boys are housed separately in the government institutions, I had to negotiate with two superintendents; one from the Shishu Paribar (boys), and one from the Shishu Paribar (girls). I visited the boys' institution first and found that dealing with the superintendent and his staff was harder than it had been with his Assistant Director. The superintendent persisted in asking if I had the correct documents, and confused my PhD research with an undergraduate work placement. Some of the staff were wary of me as an outsider who was outside their control and influence. It was not until our meeting was interrupted with a phone call from the Assistant Director himself that the superintendent changed his tone, and asked the other staff if they knew how to contact recent care leavers. I realized that all the staff were surprised to see their superintendent's change of attitude! I thanked God because without this change in attitude it would have been very difficult for me to convince them to talk openly with me.

The superintendent instructed the staff to prepare a list over the next two to three weeks of young people who left care. One female staff member, who had remained quiet previously, mentioned three care leavers. The superintendent stopped her by saying: 'those children created many problems for us and damaged our reputation; think about those who are doing well'. However, she did give me the contact details of two of the care leavers she had mentioned, and after some difficult discussion I obtained access to the institutions and hence the children.

I visited the Shishu Paribar (girls) the next morning. The area was more protected than the Shishu Paribar (boys). Some children looked at me with suspicion. Two little girls were playing kutkut<sup>28</sup> in the playing field and I asked them to take me to the superintendent's office.

I met with the superintendent and the deputy. The deputy superintendent wanted to help me reach care leavers, and hoped some good would come out of my research. However, three weeks later she informed me that the young women she knew had refused to take part in the research, for fear their husbands and in-laws would find out that they previously lived in an institution. They felt that if this information was disclosed it could create difficulties in their marriage – perhaps even separation. She recounted a number of stories of why these young women hid their identities.

I managed to build up some rapport with her, but she finally informed me that the superintendent had forbidden her to pass on any information, because I looked like a journalist. She pointed to my journalist-style satchel bag and camera (a point that was also noted at the boys' home). She explained that there been an occurrence at the Shishu Paribar (boys) which a teacher and journalists had blamed on the staff turning the public against the institution. She said that from then on journalists had always appeared to write negatively about government care institutions. Nevertheless, she promised she would do what she could to pass contact details to me – without letting the superintendent know.

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<sup>28</sup> Kutkut is a type of hopscotch.

After meeting with the superintendents from both institutions, I met again with the Assistant Director. He again directed the superintendents to assist me in my enquiries. This was particularly encouraging since the superintendent of the girls' institution was present. My subsequent visit to the girl's institution resulted in one recent care leaver's contact address. Also three girls currently residing in the institution informed me of their siblings who had recently left care.

### **Madrasah**

After several attempts, I managed to meet the superintendent. He asked me to come back the following week when he would be freer, and so could devote more time to me, but I was granted permission to visit some of the classrooms and the students' hostel.

I asked a student to show me around and he agreed. My student guide was quite talkative. According to him the Qaumi madrasah's superintendent was avoiding me, which I had not realised. 'They have diplomatic brains, and they know how to avoid people they don't like', he said. I asked him to explain why the superintendent was avoiding me. He thought that my dress, short beard and bag influenced his opinions of me. He suggested I wear a Punjabi outfit, stop trimming my beard and change my side bag!

While we were talking, a number of students came around. They wanted to know who I was. My guide introduced me to a young man who had left the madrasah the previous year. He was there visiting his brother. I told him about my research and he agreed to participate. We agreed a meeting date.

I met with the Qaumi superintendent and he informed me that they did not keep any written records on those who had left. He suggested that I talk to current students since they were, for the most part, friends and siblings of ex-residents. Finally both superintendents allowed me regular access to the madrasah to talk with young people and staff.

## APPENDIX: 2

### Translation copy of the original

12 July 2006

Deputy Director  
Department of Social Welfare  
XXXXX

### Application to gain official permission to conduct PhD research at the government Shishu Paribar (Boys and Girls)

Dear Sir,

My name is Tuhinul Islam, Assistant Director, Education and Child Development Programme of XXXX. Currently I am a studying for a PhD in Social Work at the University of Edinburgh. My research title is 'An Exploration of the Experiences of Young People Leaving Residential Childcare Institutions in Bangladesh'. I am interested in interviewing those young people who had left the institutions and the specific group of staff who are involved with their in care and aftercare support.

I write this letter to kindly ask you for permission to conduct research at the XXXXX Shishu Paribar (boys and girls) and to interview those young people who had left institutions and their staff. I am particularly interested in exploring young people's preparation and leaving care process and aftercare support.

In addition, I would like permission to access some of the young people's personal files and other available documents relating to the young people's in care, through-care and aftercare support.

I have attached a summary of the approach I have taken in my proposed research for further information.

I hope you will find my application acceptable.

Yours faithfully

Tuhinul Islam  
Assistant Director  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
and  
PhD student, Social Work  
The University of Edinburgh,  
Edinburgh  
Scotland, UK

## APPENDIX: 3

### Education Systems in Bangladesh

Education in Bangladesh is divided into three stages: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary education lasts five years from the age of six and is compulsory. Secondary education lasts seven years and is divided into three sub-stages: 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary. Higher secondary is followed by tertiary level education in which one can specialise in a particular field. Post-primary education is divided into four categories; general, madrasah, technical-vocational and professional education.

### General Education

After completing primary school at the age of 11, children spend seven years in secondary school undergoing a basic general education. After completing this they can choose to continue in general education in the form of a vocational or technical course.

At the end of their secondary education, students must sit their Public Examination and those who are successful are awarded a Secondary School Certificate (SSC). Then at the end of higher secondary education they sit another Public Examination and receive their Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), which allows them to continue to higher education, including university.

### Madrasah Education

Broadly speaking, there are three types of madrasah education in Bangladesh; Aliya, Qaumi and Hafizia. Only Aliya madrasahs are registered with the government, and some are also financially supported by the government. They teach religion as well as secular subjects. They are divided into five levels, equivalent to the general education system (Table below). Aliya madrasah students can enrol into general, Technical or Vocational courses after obtaining their Alim (equivalent to SSC) and Fazil (equivalent to HSC) certificates (Banbeis 2010).

Qaumi madrasahs emphasize orthodox Islamic education. Qaumi madrasahs are run by the community, without government support. Qualifications are not recognised by the government. However, recently Qaumi madrasahs have organized themselves under the Befaql Madaris (Qaumi Madrasah Board) in an attempt to have their qualifications recognised. Their qualifications, although not at present officially recognised, have equivalents in the secular and Aliya education systems (Table below).

Hafizia madrasahs are generally attached to Aliya and Qaumi madrasahs. In this system, children memorize the Qur'an only. Usually they start at a very early age and take two to four years to memorize it. Once they have memorized the entire Qur'an, then they are called Hafiz-a-Qur'an or Hafiz. A Hafiz can enter the Aliya or Qaumi madrasah for further education. It is not a government-recognised qualification.

### Technical-Vocational and Professional Education

There are separate streams for technical-vocational and professional education. For example, Engineering, Medicine and Agriculture are offered by various institutions, colleges and universities. A summary of the current educational structure is given in Table (below). These are closely related to their European equivalents.

**Table: Educational Structure of Bangladesh**

		GENERAL			TECHNICAL- VOCATIONAL		PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION		MADRASAH <sup>29</sup>					
Age	Grade	BACHELOR Honours		MASTERS (Preliminary)	BACHELOR Technical	BACHELOR Education	MASTERS		ALIYA	QAUMI	HAFIZIA			
23+	XVIII	MPHil/ PhD		MASTERS	MBBS (Med)									
22+	XVII	MASTERS		MASTERS (Preliminary)	BACHELOR Technical	BACHELOR Education	KAMIL			TAQMEEL				
21+	XVI	BACHELOR Honours		BACHELOR (Pass)	Diploma		FAZIL		FAZEELAT					
20+	XV													
19+	XIV													
18+	XIII													
17+	XII	HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION		HSC	HSC Vocational	Certificate in Education	ALIM		SANUBIA ULYA					
16+	XI	SECONDARY EDUCATION		SSC	SSC Vocational		DHAKIL		MUTAWASITA					
15+	X													
14+	IX													
13+	VIII	SECONDARY EDUCATION					DHAKIL JUNIOR				HAFIZ- A- QURAN			
12+	VII													
11+	VI													
10+	V	PRIMARY EDUCATION					EBTEDIA YEE		IBTIDIA					
9+	IV													
8+	III													
7+	II													
6+	I													

Adapted from [http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/es\\_bd.htm](http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/es_bd.htm) (Banbeis 2010)<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Qaumi madrasah's grade level and duration is not universal. Some madrasahs are not under the central Qaumi Madrasah Education Board, yet, many choose to follow it.

<sup>30</sup> Banbeis (2010) *Madrasah Education*. Available at: ([http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/db\\_bb/madrasah\\_education\\_1.htm](http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/db_bb/madrasah_education_1.htm)). Accessed on 10 July 2010.

## **APPENDIX: 4**

### **QUESTION GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAD LEFT CARE**

(Note: This question was a flexible outline and was not followed rigidly but applied and developed as appropriate to the respondent's circumstances, his/her responses and the context of the interview.)

#### **BACKGROUND**

- Where do you live?
- Who lives with you?
- How many siblings do you have?
- What are their occupations?
- How old you are?
- How long did you live in the institution?
- When did you leave the institution?

#### **ENTRY**

- Can you remember your first day at the institution?
- Did you know the reason why you came to live in the institution? Who helped to get your admission?

#### **OVERALL EXPERIENCES**

- Can you tell me of your experiences at the institution from the day you entered to the day you left?
- Tell me about your happy memories while at the institution – those that made you laugh, feel good.
- Tell me about your saddest memories.
- What did the institution teach you?
- Do you feel the institution was helpful or harmful for your life? Why?

#### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

- Do you have any qualifications and how did you get them?
- Tell me about your school experiences.
- Were you offered any skills or vocational training?
- Were you offered any tuition, guidance and help to prepare you for lessons and in completing your homework?
- Were you given sufficient educational materials?
- Apart from study what did you do while in care?
- What do you think about the extra-curricular activities? Were they harmful or helpful to your studies?
- How can educational provision be improved in the institution?
- Other than education, what else is important for success?

#### **HEALTHCARE, EXERCISE AND RECREATION**

- Were you ever ill while in care? If yes, what support was offered you?
- What was your staple diet while in care? Did you enjoy the food?
- Did staff eat the same food you ate?
- What physical exercise did you take part in?

- Were you offered any health education training?
- Did you have time for leisure and play?
- What sources of entertainment were available to you?

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

- How did you get on with the other children in the institution?
- How did staff get on with the other children?
- What was your relationship with the staff?
- What was your and the institution's relation with the wider community?
- How did you get on with school colleagues and your school teacher?
- Did your family visit you while you were in care? If yes, how often did you see them and who decided how often you saw each other?
- Was there any staff in the institution that you felt particularly close to, like a parent or guardian figure? Who and why was that, what qualities did that person have?
- Was there anyone in the institution to whom you could tell your personal feelings?
- Did you feel that staff respected your opinion, advice, passion and aspiration?
- Did you feel the staff had expectations of you? Did they believe in your talent and potential?
- What did you think motivated staff to work in the care home? Was it money or love of children?
- In your opinion what are the ingredients for a strong healthy relationship between staff and children?

### **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

- What were the rules of the institution?
- Did you feel there were some rules that applied just to you?
- Were the rules consistent?
- Did you feel the rules were fair? Why?
- Did you know the procedure for admission and leaving the institution?
- Were the rules and regulation applied in the institution beneficial to you and other children? Should they be changed?
- What was the punishment for breaking rules?
- Can you give an example of when there were discrepancies between policy and practice?

### **PREPARATION FOR LEAVING CARE AND THROUGH CARE**

- Did you feel you were prepared enough to leave the institution? Why?
- Did you feel you were ready to enter the outside world, when you were given in marriage?
- Before leaving the institution, did staff discuss the process with you?
- When did you come to know you had to leave the institution what was your immediate reaction to this? Did you feel frightened?
- What opportunities did the institution make available to you to prepare you for the future?
- What training and advice were you offered before leaving care?
- Did the institution offer you anything specific on how to make your life a success?
- What aspects of the institution did you like and dislike that were done for the purpose of your future success?
- What activities caused the expulsion of children from the institution?
- Do you think that you should have learnt other things from the institution that you could have applied in your life?

- With hindsight, do you feel you should have taken more advantage of the facilities offered you, while you were in care?

#### **AFTERCARE**

- What do you do now?
- What did you do after you left the institution?
- Did you face any difficulties after you had left the institution? If yes, how did you resolve those difficulties?
- Did you have any support once out of the institution? Who supported you?
- Did the institution help you establish yourself in society? If yes, how?
- Which life do you prefer, the life of the institution or your present life?
- How is your conjugal life?
- How close are you to your in-laws and neighbour?
- Do the staffs know about your present life situation? Did you inform them?
- How did staff in the institution behave towards you after you left?
- Did you feel prepared for the outside world, when you came out of care?
- Did you dream about your future life while you were in the institution? What was your dream?
- Do you feel your dreams have come true? If yes, what helped that to happen? If not, what hindered it?
- Everyone in the institution was given the same opportunities. You did well while others did not. Why was that? What helped you to succeed?

#### **FUTURE DIRECTION**

- Do you think care institutions are necessary? Why?
- What characteristics should staff have to prepare children?
- Should the institution authority listen to children's personal feelings to make their life better, to build children up properly, and to prepare them for real life?
- What should be done for those children who did not realize their potential while in care?
- If you were made the head of the institution, what would you do to prepare children so they did not have similar difficulties when they left care?
- If you were invited to share your experiences with institutional children and provide them with advice, what advice would you offer?
- What lessons should young people learn before leaving care so they can cope better with the outside world?
- What changes are necessary for preparation process and practices?

#### **END**

Is there anything else you would like to say – about yourself, the institution and the people in them, those who left the institution, about your happiness or sorrow – that I have not asked you?

Thank you very much for taking part in this study.

## APPENDIX: 5

University of Edinburgh,  
School of Social and Political Studies  
**RESEARCH AND RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

### Ethical review form for level 2 and level 3 auditing

This form should be used for any research projects carried out under the auspices of SSPS that have been identified by self-audit as requiring detailed assessment - i.e. level 2 and level 3 projects under the three-tier system of ethical approval that has been developed by the Research and Research Ethics Committee of the School. The levels within the system are explained in the SSPS Research Ethics Policy and Procedures document. Please tick the appropriate box to indicate which level applies to your research.

This form provides general School-wide provisions. Proposers should feel free to supplement these with detailed provisions that may be stipulated by research collaborators (e.g. NHS) or professional bodies (e.g. BSA, SRA). The signed and completed form should be submitted, along with a copy of the research proposal (or a description of the research goals and methodology where this is unavailable) to the relevant person (Head of School/Institute for proposals for external funding; Course Organiser for undergraduate student projects; supervisor or Programme Director for postgraduates) and also lodged (if possible electronically) with the School Research Administrator for forwarding to the Research and Research Ethics Committee.

Research and Research Ethics Committee will monitor level 2 proposals to satisfy themselves that the School Ethics Policy and Procedures are being complied with. They will revert to proposers in cases where there may be particular concerns or queries. For level 3 audits, work should not proceed until Research and Research Ethics Committee has considered the issues raised. Level 3 applications should be submitted well in advance of a required date of approval.

#### SECTION 1: PROJECT DETAILS

1.1 Title of Project

**The experiences of young people leaving residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh**

1.2 Principal Investigator, and any Co-Investigator(s)

(Please provide details of Name, Institution, Email and Telephone)

**Md. Tuhinul Islam, PhD Student, Department of Social Work, School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh, XXXX Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, Scotland.**

1.4 Does the sponsor require formal prior ethical review? YES  NO

If yes, by what date is a response required

1.5 Does the project require the approval of any other institution and/or ethics committee? YES  NO

If YES, give details and indicate the status of the application at each other institution or ethics committee (i.e. submitted, approved, deferred, rejected).

1.6 This project has been assessed using this checklist and is judged to be

LEVEL 2  (for information to Research Ethics Committee)

LEVEL 3  (for discussion by Research Ethics Committee)

1.7 If Level 3, is there a date by which a response from the committee is required?

Name..... Signature.....

**PLEASE ATTACH A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (OR ALTERNATIVELY A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH)**

Please see enclosure

**SECTION 2: POTENTIAL RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS**

2.1 Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort? YES  NO

If YES, state the nature of the risk and what measures will be taken to deal with such problems.

**Interviews can leave young care leavers with psychological stress or discomfort if they have had any traumatic experiences while they were in care. It is not unlikely that they may start crying, become aggressive, or stop talking during interviews. In addition, for some participants it may be their only opportunity to ‘de-brief’ their experiences. Careful considerations will be taken not to put them under pressure emotionally in order to understand the issues deeper. If anything very serious happens (e.g. crying, physical aggression), counselling will be provided by me as well as organisation’s professional counsellor. Furthermore, doctors’ advice will be taken from the (NAME) Hospital for more extreme cases of stress and psychological problems. An agreement between (NAME) and me will be done before starting the research.**

**Secondly trustworthiness is very important in qualitative research to elicit information, and friendship is the best way to achieve this. To develop trustworthy relationships, I will watch the behaviour of individual care leavers and staff. From these observations, I will learn how to build the relationships. It will facilitate my relationship with young care leavers and staff if they realise that I wish to understand their feelings, experiences and views from their perspective. This relationship will help me to handle the risk that might arise regarding psychological distress and to minimise them.**

**Finally my previous experience as a facilitator and interviewer should enable me to create an environment where participants will be willing to share their feelings and experiences without any physiological discomfort.**

2.2 Does the research require any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures? YES  NO

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with potential problems.

2.3 Does the research involve the investigation of any illegal behaviour? YES  NO

If YES, give details.

2.4 Is it possible that this research will lead to the disclosure of information about child abuse or neglect? YES  NO

**If YES, indicate the likelihood of such disclosure and your proposed response to this. If there is a real risk of such disclosure triggering an obligation to make a report to Police, Social Work or other authorities, a warning to this effect must be included in the Information and Consent documents.**

**Though the likelihood is low, however, if I find any information about child abuse and neglect that cause to serious harm to the young people then I will inform that to the respective authority. The breach of confidentiality will be done with the participant’s knowledge.**

2.5 Is there any purpose to which the research findings could be put that could adversely affect participants? YES  NO

If YES, describe the potential risk for participants of this use of the data. Outline any steps that will be taken to protect participants.

2.6 Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way? YES  NO

If YES, give details and outline procedures to be put in place to deal with such problems.

2.7 Could this research adversely affect members of particular groups of people? YES  NO

If YES, describe these possible adverse effects and the protection to be put in place against them.

2.8 Is this research expected to benefit the participants, directly or indirectly? YES  NO

If YES, give details.

**The research findings could be used to draw up laws, policies and practices that are currently absent in residential childcare practice in Bangladesh. The findings may be generalized for residential childcare institutions, and its general recommendations could be replicated for similar kinds of homes. The study will suggest good practice from the young people's perspective that could be used as a model for future development and improvement. Finally, it could develop into a directive for an organized care leaver program in the social, economic and, cultural context of Bangladesh.**

2.9 Will the true purpose of the research be concealed from the participants? YES  NO

If YES, explain what information will be concealed and why. Will participants be debriefed at the conclusion of the study?

If not, why not?

**Participants have the rights to know the true purpose of the research. There is nothing wrong to share the true purpose of the research. I also believe that a participatory approach will provide motivation for their involvement and enhance their feelings of empowerment.**

### SECTION 3: PARTICIPANTS

3.1 How many participants is it hoped to include in the research?

**Approximately between 63 to 101 participants**

**(Young care leavers: 33-51, Teachers and Social workers: 24-42 and Professionals: 6-8)**

3.2 What criteria will be used in deciding on the inclusion and exclusion of participants in the study?

**The three categories to be considered for inclusion in the study will be: (a) Young people who have left care within five years, between ages 14 and 22, and who had lived in a home a minimum of one year, (b) teachers and social workers who have worked at the institution for a minimum of one year, and (c) higher professionals (head of the homes and organisations, care leavers' employers, law enforcement agencies, health professionals, Social Welfare Ministry personnel, journalists, NGO professionals, religious leaders and donors) who have some involvement and experience with residential care.**

**Those excluded from the study will be young people, teachers, and social workers who are not willing to be tape recorded and involved in a group interview for focus group discussions. Young people who are blood brothers or sisters will also not be eligible for the study, as their views and opinions may be shaped and influenced by each others experiences that may result in pollution of the data. Focus group participants will be excluded from in-depth interviews.**

3.3 Are any of the participants likely to:

be under 16 years of age?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
children in the care of a Local Authority?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
known to have special educational needs	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
physically or mentally ill?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
vulnerable in other ways	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
members of a vulnerable or stigmatized minority?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
unlikely to be proficient in English?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
in a client or professional relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
in a student-teacher relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
in any other dependent relationship with the researchers?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
have difficulty in reading and/or comprehending any printed	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
material distributed as part of the study?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If YES to any of the above, explain and describe the measures that will be used to protect and/or inform participants.

**I speak the same language as the participants' do so there is no problem at all if the participants do not to know English.**

3.4 How will the sample be recruited?

**Participants will be reached through the respective organisations. During recruitment, participants will be asked if they are aware of any friends who fulfil inclusion criteria.**

3.5 Will participants receive any financial or other material benefits because of participation? YES  NO

If YES, what benefits will be offered to participants and why?

**Financial incentives, snacks, lunch and transport allowance will be given to all participants in focus group discussions and interviews. Moreover from experience it can be said that there is a general believe among Bangladeshi's that people who live abroad, whatever may be the reasons for living abroad, earn lots of money. It is also a tradition in Bangladesh to offer foods at any gatherings. Financial incentives are only provided for compensation of the participants' time.**

**Before completing Sections 4 & 5 please refer to the University Data Protection Policy to ensure that the relevant conditions relating to the processing of personal data under Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 are satisfied. Details are Available at: [www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk](http://www.recordsmanagement.ed.ac.uk)**

#### **SECTION 4: CONFIDENTIALITY AND HANDLING OF DATA**

4.1 Will the research require the collection of personal information from e.g. universities, schools, employers, or other agencies about individuals without their direct consent? YES  NO

If YES, state what information will be sought and why written consent for access to this information will not be obtained from the participants themselves.

4.2 Will any part of the research involving participants be audio/film/video taped or recorded using any other electronic medium? YES  NO

If YES, what medium is to be used and how will the recordings be used?

**Audio recorder and camera will be used with prior consent.**

4.3 Who will have access to the raw data?

**Researcher and participants only**

4.4 Will participants be identified? YES  NO

4.5 If yes, how will their consent to quotations/identifications be sought?

4.6 If not, how will anonymity be preserved?

**Participants will be assured that all names of respondents will be changed, and data will be destroyed after analysis and assessment. I can guarantee confidentiality to the participants unless information is divulged about young people and staff at risk of serious harm, or is harmful for the organisation. However, if a breach of confidentiality is considered necessary, this will be done with the participant's knowledge. Moreover, as focus group interviews differ from any other qualitative approaches, the ethical issues that might be encountered also differ. For example, there are more privacy concerns than usual because participants reveal themselves not only to the researcher, but also to the other group members. That is why I will ask group members not to share their group experiences with outsiders.**

4.7 Will the data files/audio/video tapes, etc. be disposed of after the study? YES  NO

4.8 How long they will be retained?

**Ten years**

4.9 How they will eventually be disposed of?

**Destroying (burned)**

4.10 How do you intend for the results of the research to be used?

**Through PhD dissertation and other Publications**

4.11 Will feedback of findings be given to participants? YES  NO

If YES, how and when will this feedback be provided?

**Upon completion of the study, informants will be invited to attend a feedback session where they will be presented with the current research findings. A report will be made available for residential childcare institutions. All childcare institutions will be acknowledged for their help and support during my field research. However, due to time and budget constraints, all those involved may not be reached. In addition, due to the nature of the research, certain aspects of the research are confidential.**

## **SECTION 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT**

5.1 Will written consent be obtained from participants? YES  NO

If YES, attach a copy of the information sheet and consent forms.

**In some contexts of ethnographic research, written consent may not be obtainable or may not be meaningful. If written consent will not be obtained, please explain why circumstances make obtaining consent problematic.**

**Only verbal consent will be taken, as written consent may create confusion and anxiety amongst participants, due to low literacy levels and unfamiliarity with the procedures involved with consent forms, which could affect recruitment and prevent participation.**

Administrative consent may be deemed sufficient:

a) for studies where the data collection involves aggregated (not individual) statistical information and where the collection of data presents:

- (i) no invasion of privacy;
- (ii) no potential social or emotional risks:

b) for studies which focus on the development and evaluation of curriculum materials, resources, guidelines, test items, or programme evaluations rather than the study, observation, and evaluation of individuals.

5.2 Will administrative consent be obtained in lieu of participants' consent? YES  NO

If YES, explain why individual consent is not considered necessary.

5.3 In the case of minors participating in the research on an individual basis, will the consent or assent of parents be obtained? YES  NO

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

If NO, give reasons.

I believe that young people are mature enough to give their consent since most of them live independently even though they are under the age of 18.

5.4 Will the consent or assent (at least verbal) of minors participating in the research on an individual basis be obtained?

YES  NO

If YES, explain how this consent or assent will be obtained.

**The participants will be informed about the study aims, objectives, research process, their involvement, and the length of time involved. They will be informed also on their rights and of the potential benefits of the research to them or others. They will be asked for their consent following the initial discussion. Verbal consent will be documented by tape recorder and notes.**

If NO, give reasons.

5.5 In the case of participants whose first language is not English, will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES  NO

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

If NO, give reasons.

Because the researcher speaks the same language as the participants.

5.6 In the case of participants with special educational needs will arrangements be made to ensure informed consent?

YES  NO

If YES, what arrangements will be made?

If NO, give reasons.

No participant will be selected in that criterion

#### **SECTION 6: CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The University has a draft 'Policy on the Conflict of Interest' (copies available from the Research Support Office). Regarding research the draft states that a conflict of interest would arise in cases where an employee of the University might be

**'compromising research objectivity or independence in return for financial or non-financial benefit for him/herself or for a relative or friend.'**

The draft policy also states that the responsibility for avoiding a conflict of interest, in the first instance, lies with the individual, but that potential conflicts of interest should always be disclosed, normally to the line manager or Head of Department. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest or to cease involvement until the conflict has been resolved may result in disciplinary action and in serious cases could result in dismissal.

6.1 Does your research involve a conflict of interest as outlined above YES  NO

If YES, give details.