“I would have changed anything to be a boy in the care system”

Preliminary findings from an ongoing study: Females transitioning from residential care in Victoria, Australia

Date: 11/09/2026
Presenter: Yujie Zhao
Research team: Professor Philip Mendes, Dr Jacinta Waugh, Yujie Zhao



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Statistics regarding females in care

34,600
in OOHC

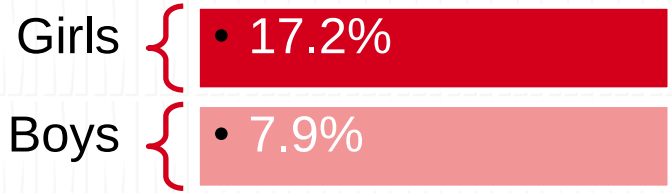
47.9%
were girls

8%
were placed in residential care

87%
in residential care or family group homes were aged over 10

Nearly a quarter
of care leavers in Victoria were from residential care

Abuse (sexual) in care



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What makes this study important

- Vulnerability:
  - maltreatment, neglect, various types of violence, multiple forms of abuse
  - Inadequate preparation before the transition; Sudden eviction
  - Family responsibilities > educational or employment achievements
- The experiences and circumstances of this cohort in Australia remain poorly understood, as they have received very limited attention in existing research.

Zhao, Y., Waugh, J., & Mendes, P. (2025). A scoping review of the transition experiences and outcomes of young women leaving residential out-of-home care. Children Australia, 47(1), 3057. https://doi.org/10.61605/cha_3057

What do we do

- **Research Question:**

  What are the experiences and challenges female residential care leavers have had during and after leaving care in Victoria?

- **Data collection:**

  Research partners in Victoria

  One-on-one interviews with young women

  One-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with frontline workers

  One-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with policy experts

Demographics

Variable	Participants, n (%)
Age	21 (19-24)
Gender	
Female	6 (86%)
Non-binary (Cisgender female)	1 (14%)
Cultural background	
Australian-born, no known recent family migration background	4 (57%)
Australian-born, with a family history of migration	3 (43%)
Duration in residential care	

Time in residential care

- Intermittent periods of residence
- Mobility
- Incidents
- Poor management

“No one wanted me”
“I didn’t see them as support. I’ve just seen it as a whole control thing”
“I feel like I’d rather someone punch me in the face 24/7 than ever stay there again”

The transition

- Transition plan
- Independent living skills
- Independent living programs

“If I did, I wasn’t aware of it”
“Definitely wasn’t ready”
“I struggled to do all of that”

Post-care lives

- Education
- Employment
- Social network

“I’m heavily impacted by my experiences in residential care especially…I just feel very defeated and stuck in my trauma, I guess”
“I don’t really ask people for help”

Post-care lives

- Housing
- Pregnancy and parenting
- Changing point

“I wanted to be different, to do something, to be positive”
“I didn’t want the life that my parents had”
“I don’t need to live like this just because I am now and live like it”

Implications and recommendations

- **Recommendation one:**

  Guaranteed housing
- **Recommendation two:**

  Women-oriented support and guidance
- **Recommendation three:**

  More structured service delivery, stronger workforce governance, and gender-responsive facilities



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THANK YOU

With sincere thanks to all participants who generously shared their experiences, and to our research partners for their ongoing support and collaboration.

Call to actions:
Email Yujie.zhao@monash.edu for more information, if you are interested in participating.

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