# Challenges in the transition to adulthood of young-adult Arabs who graduated from residential facilities in Israel

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a complex and critical period during which young adults are required to make significant decisions that will affect their adult lives (Arnett, 2000). The current exploratory study is the first to look at the challenges and barriers in this transitional life stage of 23 Israeli Arab young adults, from their own perspectives, after leaving residential care. Thematic analysis revealed several main themes among the participants, including cultural and social expectations, self-perceptions as a minority group, harmful and unsupportive family relationships, lack of informal guidance, and economic hardship. The study's findings illustrate the role of cultural and sociopolitical aspects during this transition, and emphasize the unique additional challenges for Arab young adults as a result of their being part of a collectivist and patriarchal society as well as being part of a minority. The discussion addresses the connection between these multiple challenges in the context of emerging adulthood theory. Implications for practice include developing new services that take into consideration the young adults' needs, and designing interventions that allow for the strengthening of family ties, as well as the creation of positive and supportive relationships with formal and informal authority figures.

## 1. At-risk young-adult Arabs during the transition to adulthood

Young-adult Arabs between the ages of 18 and 35 comprise approximately 28% of the Arab-citizens of Israel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Like their peers, as they reach the age of 18, they enter the transitional period to adult life. According to the emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2000), this period represents an important developmental phase during which young adults will optimally acquire the skills and experiences that will allow them to take on adult roles and responsibilities. During this period they must make significant life decisions about housing, employment, career, marriage, and new social networks. Also, the theory assumes five features that are more pronounced during the emerging adulthood period than in other periods: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a plethora of possibilities, and a feeling of being in between adolescence and adulthood. It is argued that in industrialized countries there are more possibilities for young people with regard to occupation and educational choices. As a result, young people today need more time in order to explore their identities and future possibilities. In addition, they experience instability in terms of housing and jobs and rely more on their families for practical and emotional support (Arnett, 2000).

The concrete and developmental tasks young adults must deal with during this phase make emerging adulthood a challenging period for most young adults, and this is even more the case for at-risk young adults, such as care leavers (Arnett, 2007; Mann-Feder, 2019; Van Breda, 2015). Earlier studies have shown that care leavers are especially vulnerable during this life period given their life history, the abrupt move to adult life, and the scant to nonexistent parental support they receive (Courtney & Hughes-Huering, 2005; Mann-Feder, 2019; Stein, 2012; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017).

Although the literature regarding care leavers' challenges and outcomes in Israel is growing (Refaeli, Benbenishty, & Zeira, 2019; Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2018), research on Arab care leavers lags behind. Most researchers agree that compared with Jewish society, Arab society in Israel, as a whole, is more traditional and collectivistic and suffers from marginalization and lower resource allocation (Haidar, 2005). As such, it is reasonable to assume that these factors might impact the experience of young-adult Arabs during their transition to adulthood. However, the existing literature on this population, and specifically on care leavers in this population, is extremely limited; it is a population that has been underrepresented in the research.

Young-adult Arabs emancipated from care likely deal with the same issues that other young adults in the general population deal with during this period, including their future paths related to career, studies, and family. Also, like other care leavers worldwide, they may experience additional challenges due to the abrupt transition into

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independent living, such as limited emotional and social support, difficulties in adjusting to new frameworks, economic difficulties, and social isolation (Lukšík & Hargašová, 2018; Mann-Feder, 2019). Being part of a minority society in Israel, however, these young people are presumably also preoccupied with additional issues such as their self-identity as a minority group, the political circumstances surrounding them, and feelings of exclusion and discrimination (Chaider, Chamdan, & Awadi, 2010; Miaari & Hadad Haj-Yahya, 2017). In addition, being a care leaver in the Arab society in Israel is much less accepted than in the Jewish society. Israel Arab youth are under represented in the substitute care system. Referring a child to substitute care might run counter to the prevailing trust in their own social and cultural networks. They might also be connected to the sociopolitical context and to a suspicious attitude towards Israeli authorities Attar-Schwartz, 2013; Haj-Yahia & Attar-Schwartz, 2008).

## 2. Cultural and socio-political aspects in the transition to adulthood

It can be assumed that the cultural context in which young adults live has a crucial impact on the way they experience their transition to adulthood and the outcomes of this transition. Arab society, which accounts for 20% of the population in Israel, includes three main groups: Muslims (the biggest group), Christians, and Druze, all of whom share several socioeconomic features including a relatively higher rate of poverty, a high birth rate, and lower participation in the labor market compare with the Jewish population. Specifically, more than 60% of Arab families in Israel live below the poverty line, and about one-third of Arab students drop out of high school before their senior year (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Mahajna, 2014).

Arabs in Israel are a national-minority in Israel. As such, the relationship between Arab and Israeli society, and between Arab society and Israel's governmental institutions, is complex. Like their elders, young-adult Arabs are part of a minority group in Israel facing social and economic marginalization, lower resources, and social discrimination and exclusion. Also, many young Arabs deal with language barriers (Chaider et al., 2010; Miaari & Hadad Haj-Yahya, 2017).

Research on the transition to adulthood of young-adult Arabs in Israel is scarce. Earlier studies focused mainly on the status of non-at-risk Arab adolescents (Mahajna, 2007; Seginer, 2009), and young adults in relation to their career decisions (Mahajna, 2014). A recent study that focused on 422 young-adult Arabs between the ages of 19–23 found that 37% of them were not integrated into any formal setting (training, education, or employment). Specifically, half were unemployed (Miaari & Hadad Haj-Yahya, 2017). To date, no study has investigated the unique challenges of young-adult Arabs who graduated from residential facilities for at-risk youth in Israel, from their own perspectives, during this complex and defining period.

## 3. Research goals

The goal of this exploratory study was to delve into the challenges and barriers in the transition to adulthood of young-adult Arab care leavers, through their own perspectives. The aim was to fill the gap in the literature regarding these young people's paths into adulthood and to broaden our understanding of their unique experiences, specifically in terms of their being part of a minority society. The study's findings could shed light on the role, during this transitional life stage, of cultural and sociopolitical aspects. The findings might also help professionals in the field to design services and interventions that would support the unique and specific needs of this population during such a consequential life stage.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants

The sample included 23 graduates of Arab residential facilities in Israel. Israel's Ministry of Welfare and Social Services has placed over the years about 10,000 children and adolescents in therapeutic residential facilities, about 19% of whom are integrated into facilities designed for Arab youth. Those facilities are specifically designed for at-risk children from broken families. In these facilities the managerial staff, the clinical staff, and the caregivers are almost invariably Arab, in order to allow the children to maintain their cultural identities (Attar-Schwartz, 2014). Among the 23 care leavers, 14 (60%) were young women and 9 (40%) were young men, between the ages of 18–25, with an average age of 21. The majority of the participants were single; three were married with a child; and one participant (a young woman) was divorced. Also, most of the participants worked mainly in non-professional and temporary positions (e.g., cleaning or supermarket jobs). Only three were in educational frameworks. In terms of housing, almost two-thirds of the participants lived in their parents' homes (60%), and the rest (40%) lived in a shelter, a hostel, or with roommates/spouses, mainly because living with their family was not an option.

### 4.2. Procedure

After obtaining approval from the ethics committee of the researchers' universities, the research staff received the contact details of care leavers from their former residential care facilities and randomly selected a convenience sample of young adults between the ages of 18–25 who had left care one to six years previously. First, the young adults were approached over the phone. They were given an explanation about the study goals and were asked for their consent to participate in the study. The participants who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study were interviewed face to face in a place of their choice. Of the 42 young adults, 23 matched the selection criteria that were defined ahead of the interview and gave their consent to participate. The selection criteria were: Young-adult Arabs in the early years of their emerging adulthood (i.e., ages 18–25) who had spent at least two years in a residential care setting, including therapeutic residential facilities. We also tried to include young adults who were in a variety of frameworks, such as those in school, those employed, and those unemployed. In addition, we chose young adults living in a variety of housing settings (e.g., living at home with their parents, living alone/with roommates).

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed, consisting of open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, recorded and transcribed and the translated into Hebrew. Each interview lasted approximately 35 min, during which time the young adults were asked to describe themselves (background, occupation, age, etc.). They were also asked about their current life status and the challenges and barriers they faced in their daily lives and in trying to realize their goals.

### 4.3. Data analysis

The method used to analyze the interviews was grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) and theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which are used to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data. Using theoretical thematic analysis allowed the use of pre-existing theoretical frameworks, such as emerging adulthood theory (Arnett, 2000). Analysis was performed by three readers (the two interviewers and the leading researcher), who interpreted the participants' answers and extracted central themes that expressed participants' perceived challenges and barriers. The readers employed an incident-by-incident coding technique in which every portion of the interview transcript was read and coded for important

themes. This phase was followed by a focused coding process, during which the incident codes were reread and analyzed in order to identify larger themes. During these phases, the readers analyzed the interviews and then met to discuss themes and resolve any discrepancies. Finally, after the challenges and barriers codes had evolved, the readers once again sifted through all the data, using a focused coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The ensuing coding created three main categories with various related subcategories. To further check the validity of the findings, a summary report was translated into Arabic and provided to the participants via email, and their feedback was integrated into the final data analysis.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Barriers and challenges during the transition to adulthood

Participants were asked to describe the challenges they confronted during their daily lives and while pursuing their goals and plans. Three major themes arose from their descriptions. The first theme centered around "cultural and social expectations and limitations." This major theme concerned the challenges that participants had in terms of being part of their community in light of its norms, and expected behaviors and duties within their family as a result of these norms. Also, this theme related to their self-perceptions as a minority group. The second theme concerned their "social ties" and included three subthemes: harmful and unsupportive family relationships, lack of formal and informal guidance, and loneliness. Finally, the last major theme related to their limited "personal capital" and included their family's and own economic hardship and educational gaps (Fig. 1).

### 5.1.1. Cultural and social features and expectations

The theme of social norms and expectations was evident in all of the participant interviews. Social restrictions and limitations imposed by the community were described as a major barrier, especially among care leavers who lived in relatively small communities. This point was elaborated upon mostly by the female participants, who felt that because of gender perceptions they could not study or work, and were encouraged instead to get married at an early age; male participants also discussed this aspect, describing their obligation to take care of

their families and support them economically because of expectations of them as "men." This latter point was especially true when the father of the family was absent and the young man was expected to take his place, essentially becoming the "father of the house." Participants also emphasized the barriers and challenges resulting from being part of a minority group in light of the complex relationships between this group and society at large, and the limited resources and services available to young adults like them (i.e., care leavers). The subthemes that emerged within this theme were as follows:

*5.1.1.1. Adhering to community norms and expectations.* The majority of participants described the community and its norms, perceptions, and expectations as a main barrier in their lives and as a challenging aspect in terms of pursuing and realizing their plans. In most of their descriptions, community norms, perceptions, and expectations were synonymous with participants' parents' norms, perceptions, and expectations, and thus influenced their lives profoundly. This idea was especially true for participants who lived in small villages where community ties and social restrictions were strong, as is evident in the interview of one young woman: *"I can't even think about my dreams, hobbies, love (is it good anyway?). I went through and am still going through very difficult things in my life. I never felt in control of my life. I was always controlled by others…my family, my village, the society… My life is full of barriers and very limited"* (young woman, 19). Another young woman (age 23), who underwent a divorce despite her family's wishes, and without community approval, said: *"I live in a village. You must remember this. I am divorced and everyone knows my story…I have to survive and take care of myself."*

These cultural perceptions were related in many cases to core areas that have a potentially great impact on young adults' personal growth and social mobility, including their careers and future studies: *"I have many difficulties in my life but the first and main challenge is me being a woman in the society I live in. It really prevents me from doing what I want to do. I need to work and earn my own money but my family doesn't approve of the work places that I can work in. It really holds me back"* (young woman, 21).

Participants with a personal status considered to be "unacceptable" or "intimidating" to the community, such as divorced young women or individuals whose families have a history of mental illness, felt that
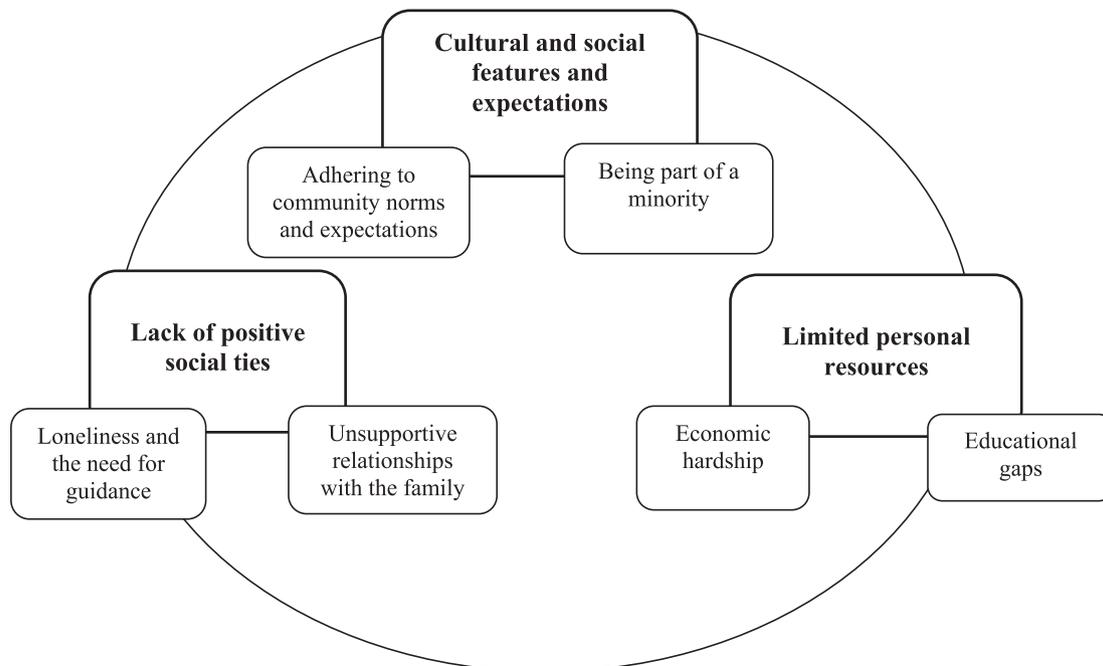


**Fig. 1.** Challenges in the transition to adulthood of young-adult Arabs.

they had yet another front on which to fight. The following young woman (age 22), whose mother struggles with schizophrenia, said: *"As a young woman, I think that the culture forces on me all kinds of norms and customs that don't go hand in hand with my wishes. My father wouldn't allow me to go to college or live on my own away from home…Arab society doesn't approve of people who have mental illness, they call them crazy and stigmatize them. I never had friends in my village, and no man wanted to marry me once they found out about my mother's schizophrenia."* Another young man (24), who supported his mother and two sisters after the family managed to flee the abusive father, emphasized the long-lasting influence of community norms on him as both a child and young adult who was expected to become the "man" and the "head" of the family pursuant to the father's absence: *"Our society always empowers the man and preserves the violence. It continues to go on in this way because of society's legitimization, and the shame of reporting violence. This is why it was very hard for my mother to leave. So I left school, and went to work (age 14). I am sure that in other communities they would have insisted on my staying in school, and would have supported my mother so that I wouldn't have had to work."*

*5.1.1.2. Being part of a minority.* Participants' perceptions of themselves as being part of a minority emerged as another source of great frustration, and a challenge. Two participants (ages 21 and 23), who supported their mothers and siblings after their fathers' departures or deaths, said:

> *"The country doesn't acknowledge our difficulties, and they just leave us to manage on our own. The country doesn't help us make any progress in our lives at all."*
> *"I don't see any future in this country for a person like me. The country makes it hard for us and doesn't allow us to earn a decent living. I want to become an engineer and be a part of society, but it is impossible."*

A few of the participants described their difficulties in trying to fit into Jewish society and emphasized both their subjective feelings of alienation and discrimination, as well as concrete barriers such as limited services for Arab youth, and/or the language barrier. One 23-year-old participant said: *"Many things stop me from pursuing my goals today, for instance racism. I want to learn auto-mechanics but it's usually only possible in Jewish-owned body-shops, so I have a smaller chance. Plus, the language is a barrier to me. I don't know how to speak or write in Hebrew."* Another participant (age 23) said: *"I am very ambitious and I hope for the best! But I don't see many things around me that will help me succeed. This country doesn't have enough services or resources for young adults like us."*

Some of the participants saw their difficulties as resulting from a variety of the minority statuses they inhabited: *"I am a girl in Arab society. That, in and of itself, is a challenge. Also, being an Arab in this country puts you through many additional difficulties, in addition to being an at-risk youth. I always feel alienated because of my gender, my own society, and my age"* (young woman, 21).

### 5.2. Lack of positive social ties

The participants' social ties (or lack thereof) emerged as one of the main challenges in their lives. Their relationships with their parents were described as unsupportive and, in many cases, harmful. Also, many of the young adults described feelings of loneliness and isolation from their own community and from society in general; difficulties in making new friends; and trusting in both formal and informal figures. In addition, the lack of social support from authority figures and/or guidance about their life decisions and daily struggles arose as a main barrier to their success. The subthemes that emerged within this theme were as follows:

#### 5.2.1. Harmful and unsupportive relationships with the family

Relationships with families, and especially with parents, emerged as

one of the central struggles for participants. While some attributed their parents' unsupportive behavior towards them (and their community-sanctioned for them) to an alignment with community norms and social expectations (as elaborated upon in Section 5.1.1), others emphasized the personal relationships they had with their parents, as well as their parents' past and current treatment of them. Lack of support from, or abusive relationships with, parents were described mainly among those participants who had suffered maltreatment in their childhoods or adolescence. As a result of their limited resources, however, these young adults were often forced to return home after leaving residential care. Alternatively, some of them could not return home. An 18-year-old woman who ran away from home after having suffered for several years from emotional, physical, and sexual maltreatment at the hands of her father said: *"The most difficult thing for me is obviously this animal I lived with for most of my life…my nasty father, if I can even call him 'father.' Because of my family, I went through hell…they don't care about me, don't care about my life or my future. I am nothing to them. Just a toy they played with all their life."* Another woman, age 21, who lived with her family despite severe physical abuse at the hands of her brothers and sexual abuse at the hands of her father, described her complex relationships with her family and the influence of those relationships on her life, as she tried to move forward and become an independent young person: *"The relationships I have with my family don't help me in any way. Actually, they hold me back. For example, my brother prevented me from attending school or work many times, and my father even tried to lock me inside the house. My mother, who is a victim herself, suffers from health problems, so often times I give up on things in order to be next to her and take care of her."*

#### 5.2.2. Loneliness and the need for guidance

Feelings of loneliness and a sense of isolation were described frequently by the participants. Both those who lived with their families and had to deal with the requisite familial obligations and those who did not have the option of moving back home after leaving care, mentioned the lack of companionship, compassion, and emotional support from their environment. One woman, 22, who lived for more than a year in a shelter for at-risk young women, said: *" I don't have anyone that I trust…not any friends or someone specific who's helpful. People here are nice and kind to me, but I don't feel connected to any of them. I am all alone."* Another woman (age 25), living at home with a mother who suffers from mental illness, as well as with her siblings, in the aftermath of their father's abandonment of the family, emphasized the sense of isolation: *"I don't have friends I can trust to talk to about my problems or the challenges I deal with. Anyway, all contact is harmful… I am not in touch with my family. Although I live with them in the same house, I don't leave my room unless I go to work. I am disconnected from everybody."*

The wish for a loving hand, support, and guidance came through clearly in the participants' interviews, as they aimed to be like peers of theirs who had the chance to realize their hopes and dreams: *"It would be very helpful if I had someone close to me to support me and guide me. Someone that I could turn to and think with, together, about the decisions I need to make, or protect me from being harmed or exploited"* (young woman, 25 years old). Another young man who was supporting his family in the aftermath of his father being arrested for perpetrating violence against his siblings said: *"I'm not sorry for helping my family. I will continue helping them, but I always feel that another opportunity, or mentoring by an older person, would help me arrive in a better place one day in the future. I don't have close friends, and I keep my distance from strangers so that I can spend more time with my family."*

### 5.3. Limited personal resources

The lack of personal resources – including financial resources, and past and current educational achievements – emerged as a central challenge in the participants' lives. They described their ongoing

struggles to support both themselves and their families as being linked to their inability to pursue further educational goals or other personal desires. In addition, their difficulty in attaining decent and stable jobs was also connected to their poor educational achievement. The sub-themes that emerged within this theme were as follows:

### 5.3.1. Economic hardship

Striving to survive economically was described by the participants as a central barrier to reaching their goals: *"… money…money…that I don't have. I feel that I know what I want to do with my life, but I am chained in a way. I live with my mother now because I was unable to stand on my own two feet and pay for a rented apartment. I earn minimum wage and help my mother with her bills …but I want to be able to rent my own apartment. I'm afraid that living with her, with all of our fighting, will keep me from moving on and leave me in this situation of only helping her and my brothers with their bills"* (young woman, 21). Another woman (age 25) said: *"My main difficulty is financial. I work hard. I've worked in many places, doing cleaning. I work to survive… If I quit, I wouldn't make it through another day. My parents don't support me. My father and I haven't spoken for years, and my mother is sick. I always wanted to be a nurse, but I don't think that I ever will be."* Participants emphasized, repeatedly, their families' low economic status and their duty to support them financially. Being tied to the family debts and responsible for their families' monthly bills seemed to dampen the participants' aspirations and motivations for their own futures. In the words of one participant, a 20-year-old male: *"My family's socioeconomic status is a barrier for me. I am the main provider, and it's a huge responsibility, and it affects me. I sometimes prefer not to buy cigarettes or eat so that my family can eat. I've lost weight since leaving residential care…we had plenty of food there. I don't have a driver's license so it's a big problem for me."* It should also be said, however, that even those participants who did not live with their families, and did not support them, described their financial difficulties as presenting a major life challenge: *"I don't have plans or dreams the way my roommates do. I'm busy enough just trying to figure out what to do once I'm fired from my job."* Another young man who learned how to design jewelry in residential care said: *"I'm very good with what I do, and I want to open my own business, but I don't have the money to buy the equipment."*

### 5.3.2. Educational gaps

Another main barrier for participants was their current and past educational status. A lack of educational achievement was described as impeding their path to success/upward mobility. In some cases, participants' educational status was linked with their family history, as in the case of this 23-year-old male who left school at the age of 14, after the death of his father: *"If my father were alive everything would be different. I could study and wouldn't have to provide for my family…"*

There were also major educational gaps among participants who had *not* dropped out of school, as in the case of this 23-year-old woman who had lived in residential care since the age of 10: *"The thing that I most regret is my lack of educational achievement. However, I don't have the strength or plans to complete my GED."* Even care leavers who had completed their high school studies described the struggle to continue their education or to attain a high school diploma: *"In residential care, the staff also emphasized the importance of academic studies so that we'll be able to be independent and stand on our own. I tried to take their advice but failed and had to move back in with my family. "Now I work as a kindergarten teacher because my uncles own the kindergarten; I never did receive my high school diploma"* (21-year-old young woman).

## 6. Discussion and implications for practice

This exploratory study delved into the unique experiences of young-adult Arabs who graduated from residential facilities for at-risk youth in Israel, adding to the body of research on care leavers' transition to adulthood. The emerging adulthood theory characterizes this period as a time of developmental transition, when young adults pursue

employment and/or educational opportunities. This period is also defined by the variety of opportunities presented for self-exploration and future options (Arnett, 2000). However, similar to earlier studies that was conducted among Jewish care leavers in Israel (Refaeli, 2017; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017), the current study's findings show that the abovementioned characteristics do not fully align with the actual life experiences, opportunities, or choices of Arab care leavers.

### 6.1. Limited resources and possibilities

In contrast with most young people from industrialized Western countries who continue to be economically and emotionally dependent on their parents well into their twenties (Arnett, 2000), young adults leaving care must make an abrupt move from a protective and supportive environment to independent living (Stein, 2012). The findings of the current study indicate that this is the case for Arab care leavers as well, and points not only to the impossibility of leaning on their families for help, but also to their extremely limited options and resources (making self-reliance another impossibility). A number of factors account for this lack of options, including personal struggles, educational gaps, history of maltreatment, and involvement with and responsibility for their families. Economic hardship emerged as one of the biggest – if not the biggest – challenge in participants' transition to adult life. For the majority of them, their daily struggle simply to maintain economic stability not only affected their day-to-day life and put them into a kind of "survival mode," but also prevented them from making any forward progress in life or pursuing any goals or aspirations they might once have had.

Educational status also emerged as a crucial barrier in the transition to adulthood. This finding has been reported in other studies focusing on care leavers' readiness for independent living, indicating major educational gaps (Courtney & Hughes-Huering, 2005; Sulimani-Aidan, Melkman, & Greeson, 2019), and is supported by evidence of their poor educational achievement in adulthood (Jackson & Cameron, 2014). Indeed, educational and financial barriers have been found in many earlier studies among care leavers (Mendes, Baidawi, & Snow, 2014; Van Breda, 2015). However, Israeli -Arab care leavers, given the cultural context in which they live, have additional challenges. These young adults struggle to integrate both into the Israeli labor force and into Israeli institutes of higher learning for social–national and traditional reasons, insufficient budgets and educational opportunities, a poor command of the Hebrew language, etc. (Dirazat, 2011).

Work opportunities help young people experience social inclusion, with tangible social and psychological gains (Gilligan, 2019). Therefore, it is extremely important to design and build more services and programs to support these young adults in core areas of independent living (i.e., educational, financial, employment-related). Although the country offers such services/programs for this age group in general, and is now in the early stages of developing and implementing a national program for at-risk young adults, the services and professional staff available to at-risk young-adult Arabs, and particularly those who have been emancipated from care, are few and far between.

### 6.2. Society, community, family: The un-detachable chain

Emerging adulthood is characterized as a period in which individuals are focused on themselves and on their own future possibilities and current opportunities (Arnett, 2000). Clearly, this is often not the case among young-adult Israeli Arabs. This observation characterizes other ethnic group from lower social classes in the world (Arnett, 2003, 2015). Fulfilling what they perceived as their obligations to family and community norms/expectations prevented the current study participants from exploring options for themselves or pursuing the goals they might once have had for themselves. The centrality of family and community during the transition to adulthood has previously been discussed in relation to the experiences of Jordanian care

leavers making the transition from residential care to adulthood (Ibrahim & Howe, 2011). Arab culture is patriarchal and collectivist; the individual's identity is based on membership in the family and group; and there are deep-rooted values based on notions of honor. The nature of patriarchy mostly prioritizes the rights and dominance of men, and all family members have a collective responsibility to protect the unity and honor of the family (Kawar, 2000). In some ways, the society's collectivist nature can be an asset for young adults in that it can give them a sense of belonging and a safety net during transitional periods. However, for at-risk youth, such as care leavers, the collectivist and patriarchal nature of this society seems to serve as an additional risk factor. The majority of these families struggle economically and the young-adult children are expected to provide for them; in the case of broken homes, they may also be expected to fill in for the absent parent. Given these cultural expectations and obligations, young adults cannot perform the central "duties" of the period of emerging adulthood, such as self-exploration, self-focus, and making plans for the future.

Given the generally patriarchal nature of Arab culture, it is assumed that there are more social restrictions on females than on males (Kulwicki, 2002). The current study strengthens this assumption among at-risk Arab young-adult women and illustrates the experiences and challenges they have during the transition to adulthood. It also sheds light on the difficulty of breaking this cycle, exploring other social roles and opportunities, and pursuing the careers they want, not only because they are financially bound to their families, but also because of gender roles and expectations in the community. Possible explanations to relatively severe findings among the young women could related to gender differences in the Arab society- in traditional, patriarchal societies, girls tend to fear social sanctions more than boys, and are under greater restrictions than boys. Also, they tend to be less encouraged than boys culturally to adopt externalizing attitudes in the face of distress (Sherer & Karnieli-Miller, 2004).

These aspects must be taken into account when considering the implications for practice in working with at risk young Arabs or in designing services to meet their needs. As an individual's identity in patriarchal and collectivist cultures cannot easily be separated from that of his or her family, it is important to include young adults' families when working with them, and to understand and consider the community norms and expectations. This recommendation is challenging in and of itself given that the majority of interventions with young adults (unlike with children and adolescents) do not include their parents. An innovative program in Israel for both at-risk Jewish and Arab young adults, which is in its initial stages, is integrating the work with parents and young adults. However, the findings of this work have not yet been documented (Salom, Ben Nun, & Cinnamon, 2018).

The current study's findings emphasize that the transition to adulthood does not take place in a socio-cultural vacuum; rather, the society from which the "emerging adult" comes, and in which he/she lives, plays a huge role. For young-adult Arabs, this socio-cultural umbrella is even wider, and includes the challenges they have and the barriers they face as a result of being part of a minority society in Israel. Feelings of alienation and concrete barriers related to mastering the Hebrew language and integrating into society at large add to their daily struggles and narrow their possibilities. Being part of a society that suffers from marginalization and lower resources (Haidar, 2005), Arab care leavers in Israel experience multiple barriers in the transition to adulthood. This situation calls for a deeper acknowledgment of the unique challenges and needs of these vulnerable youth, and for additional resources to support them as they try to make their way in life.

Receiving continued emotional and social support during the transition from care to independent living is one of the main reported struggles of care leavers worldwide (Greeson & Thompson, 2019; Mann-Feder, 2019). The care leavers in this study too emphasized their need for guidance, care from an elder figure, and support. Caring and promoting relationships similar to those, they established with meaningful adult figure in care (Shoshana, 2013).

Like other documented experiences of care leavers (Hiles, Moss, Wright, & Dallos, 2013) the current study participants experienced loneliness and a lack of new friendships. In addition, their sense of being isolated from society at large, as well as from their own community, perpetuated their vulnerability and elevated their risk. Therefore, another practical conclusion from this study would be to connect them with new supportive frameworks where they could strengthen their social ties, build positive and supportive relationships that would expose them to new opportunities, and find others who could advise them when needed.

Mann-Feder (2019) argued that we must make every effort to provide services for young adults well into their 20 s, because extended support and the availability of a safety net are critical for facilitating the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. The experience of the young adults in this exploratory study reinforce this recommendation. Although after-care programs in Israel in various areas, including education, employment, and transitional housing, are gradually developing, only a few of these have addressed – and specifically taken into consideration – the additional challenges faced by young-adult Arabs who left care.

In sum, although the transition to adulthood, in general, is one of the more challenging life tasks in modern society (Arnett, 2000), young people who leave care are compelled to face such complex life tasks on their own (Stein, 2012). This study reinforces the notion that the vulnerability of these young people requires continuity of support during these defining years. The model of change (Bridges, 2009) suggests that the success of the transition depends on meeting those needs specific to each stage, supported by a skilled transition guide. The challenges and barriers faced by the young adults in this study make abundantly clear the need for supportive and skilled figures to support and guide them at this critical stage of their lives and help them put into motion their hopes for the future, despite their past and current adversity.

## 7. Conclusions, limitation and further studies

Young-adult Arabs in Israel who leave care encounter challenges that are similar to those faced by their peers in other countries, including economic hardship, educational gaps, and lack of formal and informal support. Despite shared difficulties and experiences, however, this study's findings emphasize the unique challenges related to Arab culture as a family-based society with patriarchal and collectivist traditions (Ibrahim & Howe, 2011) and as a minority group struggling to fit into society at large, with limited resources, practical barriers, and a sense of never belonging.

The contribution of this study to the field must be considered in light of a few limitations. First, as an exploratory study, it included a small convenient sample. Future studies should explore more widely and in depth the needs and challenges of this cohort via the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Also, the present study indicates significant differences in the experiences of young women vs. young men. Although we addressed a few of the challenges that derive from gender in this patriarchal society, further investigation is needed on this front in order to distinguish the specific role that gender plays. Finally, we included only the young adults' points of view. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs of this population, it would be helpful to include the perspectives of caseworkers and other professionals who work with at-risk young Arabs, particularly those who have been emancipated from care.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104967.

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