Empowering Care Leavers in Jordan:
The Story of Children and Youth Deprived of Family Ties

Project Presentation
2018

Project Overview

Overview

In 2014, the Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF), with the support of a Democracy and Governance Grant from FHI360 and USAID, designed a research and advocacy project that aimed to empower and improve the lives of youth deprived of family ties (YDFT) in Jordan. The project had the following objectives:

- To identify the various and most salient forms of discrimination faced by YDFT in Jordan.

- To create a network of civil society organizations who provide services for care leavers in Jordan by building their capacities.

- To reduce the stigma and discrimination towards orphans by raising awareness and advocating the legal and social rights so that care leavers can integrate into a socially cohesive society.

- To further develop the draft of the national strategy and policy recommendations on alternative care, so that is evidenced based, to resolve issues and obstacles faced by care leavers in Jordan.

Component 1: Research

- Implemented in partnership with grassroots organization, Sakeena, the research identified the various forms of discrimination faced by YDFT in Jordan.

- It comprised of a legislative, literature and media review, a quantitative survey with society and qualitative participatory research with YDFT.

- The research showed that youth deprived of family ties face multiple challenges and forms of discrimination throughout different stages in their lives – resulting in their social alienation and exclusion.

- It was also found that this group of youth is forced to integrate into society without an appropriate support system and without the necessarily skills and knowledge to survive in an increasingly challenging world.

- The research concluded that while a large part of the problem was due to society's social discrimination towards these youth, care leavers were not prepared to be independent and this was preventing their ability to socially integrate into Jordan's diverse yet already fragmented society.

Component 2: Advocacy

- This component aimed to use the findings of the research to mobilize key stakeholders in order to reduce the social discrimination faced by YDFT in Jordan

- An important objective of the advocacy work was to change the way this group of youth was perceived by society. Therefore, extensive advocacy and awareness work was done with different stakeholders including the government, media, society members, care givers as well as the youth themselves

- Another crucial aspect that the project tackled during the advocacy phase was to create a system that helped care leavers transition into an independent life. This was done by establishing a network of civil society organizations (CSOs) that can effectively help the youth upon leaving the care centers. Different CSOs that have experience in providing care leavers with legal, health, education, accommodation and other services were first identified. A referral mechanism was later developed to enable the CSO network to be able to refer cases amongst themselves, allowing them to expand their outreach, and most importantly, ensure that several services are being made available to all YDFT.

Who are Youth Deprived of Family Ties?

Definitions: Children with known parents

While youth deprived of family ties are all orphans, not all orphans are deprived of family ties. In order to understand this, the different categories of orphans should be defined:

1. Children with known parents: are children who were born within wed-lock but have temporarily or permanently lost family care. They include:

- **Orphans**: in Jordan and the Arab world, orphans refers to children who have lost one or both parents. These children could be living with one parent, extended family or in residential care centers.

- **Children from broken homes**: children who have lost family care because of family disputes, domestic violence, and/or abuse and abandonment. It also includes cases of divorce, multiple marriages and difficult financial situations. These children could be living with their parents, extended family or in residential care centers.

Definitions: Children with unknown parents

2. Children with unknown parents: are children who were born out of wed-lock. In most cases, these children have permanently lost family care. They include:

- **Children whose father is unknown** : children whose mother is known and father is unknown or lineage has not be legally substantiated to the father. These children are placed in residential care centers, unless they are recognized by their fathers who may choose to take care of them.

- **Abandoned children**: children whose both parents are unknown. These children are placed in residential care centers.

- **Children of incest**: Children born as a result of incestual relations. These children are placed in residential care centers and are generally unaware of the reasons that led them into care. Therefore, they are often grouped with those with an unknown parent(s).

Definitions: YDFT and care leavers

- After the completion of this project, it was determined that all of the above mentioned children can be referred to as orphans, as they may all end up in care centers (orphanages). However it is the children with unknown parent(s) who are known as **'youth deprived of family ties'**.

- They live in residential care centers and remain under the patronage of the Ministry of Social Development up to the age of 18, after which they leave the center and become care leavers.

- **Care leavers** thereby refers to any youth who have spent a portion of their lives living in residential care centers and upon reaching the age of 18 are discharged and expected to transition into a life of independence.

What makes them a vulnerable group?

They do not belong to a family

- In the Arab world, patrilineality and patriarchy are two intertwined concepts that impact citizenship structures. In these societies, patriarchy is based on kinship. As membership in certain kin groups gives an individual access to capital, security and power, patriarchy develops patrilineality, which 'assumes domination for males by virtue of being a father and an elder kin' (Joseph 1996, cited in Farahat 2013, p13).

- Such is the case in Jordan, where the tribal structure plays a significant role in organizing citizenship. While the Jordanian society is modernizing, family still remains the most basic and important unit (Amawi 2007, cited in Farahat 2013).

- Youth deprived of family ties in Jordan are thereby expected to survive and thrive in a society which is heavily reliant on family ties, without having any family of their own.

- After spending a long time being dependent on care, they are discharged – usually at the age of 18 – and expected to transition into a life of complete independence. At this young age, and without the support of family, they are expected to find accommodation, continue education, earn a living, and start a family of their own, in a society that marginalizes them.

They are being stigmatized for circumstances beyond their control

- The disadvantage of orphans and youth deprived of family ties starts and stems from their particular circumstances. They are youth who have experienced hardships such as abandonment, neglect, abuse, violence or poverty from a very young age. Such circumstances play an integral role in their stigmatization as children, youth and adults in different stages and areas of life.

- This group of youth is often stigmatized for having lived in care centers but also for the reasons that led them into care.

- They are often stereotyped as trouble makers and repeaters of sin and stigmatized for factors that are beyond their control. This makes it harder for them to integrate into a society that makes such assumptions.

They are given discriminatory labels

- Because of their 'origin' - being born out of wed-lock - and their circumstances - being raised in a care center - they are heavily stigmatized by society and this can be seen by the labels used to describe them.

- This starts with the use of terminology like 'illegitimate' and 'foundlings' in Jordanian legislature. While the use of such terminology is not intended to deny any individual his/her right, it certainly does contribute to the spread of a social stigma that is harmful to them on a social level.

- The use of such terminology in formal institutions also encourages its spread and use throughout all levels of society. Such spread is notable in the terminology used by various media outlets in their coverage of this issue throughout the years.

- It is also notable in the terminology used by society members. This research found that society members use different terms to describe the different groups of orphans, with the most discriminatory being those referring to youth with unknown parent(s).

They often lack quality care

- Youth who took part in this research gave mixed reviews regarding their care experience and care givers. The main issue voiced regarding care givers concerned the general lack of qualification that characterizes a large number of them in the youths' opinion.

- Some participants also expressed they felt unsupported by caregivers because they scare them of what will happen to them after leaving care. The youth explained the frustration they face when some of their care givers do not believe that the youth will amount to anything when they leave care.

- It is clear that care givers have the most significant impact on the youth, even upon becoming care leavers. However that impact could either be positive or negative, depending on the qualifications of care givers and the environment that they are providing care in. This difference could especially be seen in the SOS Care Homes versus public care centers. The care giver in the former was able to provide better care having more support and less children to care for, in comparison to public care centers where care givers are often unqualified and are provided with limited resources.

They feel unprepared to leave care

- There are a number of factors that should be available to any young person when transitioning from being a dependent child to an independent young adult. Such factors include the availability of a safety net – including family, friends and community – that provides various sources of practical, emotional and financial support. This support is usually still available to young adults even after they leave home.

- These factors are usually unavailable to in-care youth who are transitioning into adulthood. The lack of family in the outside world means that their support and safety-net is limited or non-existent. Thereby it is crucial that during their time in care, they are equipped with the necessarily skills and knowledge for their survival. Because once they do leave, they are already at a higher risk of being marginalized and socially excluded by society for their particular circumstances (Ibrahim, 2010).

- Some of the youth who participated in this research expressed their fear of joining society after leaving care - indicating a lack of enthusiasm and preparedness to transition into an independent post-care life, while others expressed their readiness. However, when the question "Does anyone feel like they are ready to leave care?" was asked, the answer was unanimously "No".

- It was pointed that there's more to care than providing food and shelter and while MoSD's post-care services can be considered insufficient by some, they would be unnecessary in the first place if care homes focused on preparing individuals to be independent upon leaving care. Others felt that when they do reach the age of 18 they feel that their care experience does not gear them up to manage life post-care, and as such they feel like they have wasted years they could have utilized to acquire skills and knowledge they can rely on as independent individuals when they leave care.

They are socially excluded by society

- The survey with society members found that more than half of the respondents believed that most people in society exploit, look down and undermine YDFT and think that this group of youth is prone to deviance and delinquency. Additionally, more almost half of the respondents believed that a person born out of wedlock is more susceptible to diseases and genetic disorders.

- Overall, the results showed that there is more acceptance for youth with a deceased parent(s) and less acceptance for youth from broken homes or with an unknown parent(s). The likely reason for the decreased acceptance of the latter groups is the stigma attached to the youth and their parents. Youth from broken homes are seen as troubled individuals who are likely to inherit 'bad' traits from their parents. Similarly, youth with an unknown parent(s), in other words born out of we-lock, are considered products of immorality.

- Looking specifically at youth from broken homes or with an unknown parent(s), the survey results show that society members were more accepting of these groups if it was a matter of employing them, or having them study in the same classrooms as their children. However, their opinions changed when they were asked about friendship and marriage, as more respondents opposed the idea of having their son or daughter be friends with or get married to someone from a broken home or whose parent(s) is unknown. The level of acceptance is thereby dependent on the degree of interaction with these groups of youth.

- The youth who participated in this research reported many incidents of being stigmatized and treated differently for having lived in residential care, or for not having a family. Such discrimination was faced in schools and universities, when applying for jobs or simply attempting to find accommodation. The forms of stigmatization differed but lead most of them to share less about their personal backgrounds and stick together as a group.

They feel like they need to hide their identity and circumstances to fit in

- Extensive research with youth deprived of family ties showed that they generally avoid sharing too much of their personal information. Although male participants seemed to be more open about their identity and background, both male and female participants were worried about revealing too much of their personal information to friends, colleagues, neighbors and community members. Personal information such as their care history and the reasons that led them into care is usually kept private. They did so because they wanted to avoid being exploited, pitied or treated differently.

- The results of the survey with society show that this fear of sharing is in fact justified as this group of youth is generally portrayed negatively and avoided by society members. This shows that YDFT are in fact members of a group that has a **negative social identity**.

Theory of Change

Social identity theory

- Research showed that the youth based their identities on what they thought society thinks of them; stigmatizing them and excluding them because they are born out of wedlock. Their identity and self-perception is constructed based on what they think people think of them, and society perceives them differently or socially excludes them because they are 'born out of wedlock.'

- Therefore in order to eliminate or even reduce this stigma, it was important to use a theoretical framework that takes all of these variables into consideration, and hence, the selection of social identity theory.

- The main idea of **social identity theory** is that "a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category- a self-definition that is part of the self-concept" (Michael Hogg et al. 1995, p255).

- In other words, social identity theory is about becoming a part of a group, and how membership of the group constructs ones identity, based on the boundaries set by other groups.

Three options available to youth

1.   Individuals strive to achieve or maintain positive social identity.

2.   Positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups.

3.   When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct.

Option 2: Theory of change

- The second option, changing the association of the group from a negative, socially excluded one, to association with a positive group became the best option for the theory of change in order to reduce the social stigma.

- It was determined that society due to religious reasons, as well as culturally, see orphans in a positive light, and furthermore, feels that they are responsible to take care and protect them.

- IRCKHF then went back to the peer research team, presented this option, and they decided that as long as they are being raised in care centers (orphanages) with other orphans, that they would be part of that social in-group, orphans.

- Within that group, as a sub-group, they chose the term 'youth deprived of family ties,' which similar to the concept of an orphan, identified them with being deprived of something rather than being the 'product of sin.'

- All of this was validated with the peer research team, and every child and youth they conducted the peer research with.

Option 2: Theory of change (cont'd)

Based on social identity theory, it became clear that for IRCKHF to create a change, to reduce the social exclusion, the name identifying this group had to be changed in order to associate them with a positively perceived group versus a negatively perceived one, and hence, all of the awareness and advocacy activities with all stakeholders, government, media, civil society organizations and the community became about changing the name from 'illegitimate,' 'unknown origin,' 'foundling', and others to **'orphans: children and youth deprived of family ties.'**

Advocacy and Awareness

Overview

Two main issues creating and feeding into the youth's negative social identity:

- **The social stigma:** YDFT are stigmatized in society. They are portrayed as a group that is easily exploited, undermined and looked down upon. A large part of the stigma stems from the negative labels used to describe these youth. Additionally, absence of family ties often means absence of a support system and impacts the behavior of society members towards YDFT which hinders their full integration into society.

- **Their unpreparedness to leave care**: upon reaching the age of 18, YDFT are generally unprepared to leave care. They lack the skills and knowledge needed to create an independent life and survive in society. Their unpreparedness negatively impacts their prospects in all other areas in life including whether or not they continue education, the jobs that they land, and the quality of life that they live. The more unprepared these youth are, the less likely they will be able to socially integrate and hence be accepted by their surrounding communities.

In order to change their social identity from a negative to a positive one, the awareness and advocacy campaign incorporated a variety of activities that were undertaken with all the different stakeholders.

Civil society network

- Creating a network of civil society organizations that helps and offers services to YDFT after leaving care was one of the projects main objectives. Thereby from the onset of the advocacy campaign and based on the civil society organizations mapping, the IRCKHF brought together organizations who offer services to YDFT and were interested in joining the network. These are the following: SOS Children Village, Sakeena, Al Aman Fund for the Future of Orphans, Justice Center for Legal Aid, Saed Center for Social and Economic Empowerment , Mizan and Ministry of Social Development.

- The overall objective of the network is the coordination of existing services provided to YDFT by member organizations, which contributes to upgrading the quality of services and their accessibility by the target group.

شبكة الدعم الاجتماعي للأيتام خريجي دور الرعاية
Social Support Network For Care Leavers

Meetings and roundtables with government

- On December 31st, 2014, the IRCKHF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Social Development to work towards changings the situation of these youth. Thereafter, the IRCKHF ensured the involvement and participation of government officials in the research and advocacy phases. This took place through a series of individual meetings and a roundtable discussion throughout the duration of the project. The aim of such meetings was to present research findings as they came out and discuss the findings and possible advocacy activities to take place.

Referral Mechanism

It was found that there is a need for a referral mechanism which works on case management and coordinates the services offered among members. Therefore, the IRCKHF and the civil society network are worked on a referral mechanism that will enable the CSO network to refer cases amongst themselves, allowing them to expand their outreach, and most importantly, ensure that several services are being made available to all YDFT.

Care leavers kit

- A Care Leavers Kit was designed following a brain storming session with care leavers and another with network members.

- The kit starts with a list of the network members, a brief, and contact information for each. It contains 6 main sections: Housing, Financials, Health, Education, Life Skills, and Employment. Each section is followed by a section entitled "Useful Advice" as well as quotes from care leavers (verbatim advice) out of their personal experience and cartoon drawings.

- Moreover, every kit has a card attached to it (YDFT can take the card out and put in their wallets) with general important numbers on one side and numbers of network members on the other for the care leaver to have on him/her at all times.

Mohaka with care givers

- Mohaka is an initiative by Leaders of Tomorrow (LoT) and involves special training workshops during which individuals are exposed to a variety of role play exercises closely related to sensitive human rights issues. Participants taking part in Mohaka are immersed in role-play situations where they are educated on the issue at hand.

- LoT facilitated a Mohaka workshop with care givers in Dana Nature Reserve. A total of 18 participants (9 males, 9 females) 13 of which were care givers (7 males, 6 females) too part and were all nominated by the MoSD.

Impact: Care givers recognized the importance of the role they play in YDFT's lives, participants agreed they have gained new perspective regarding their work with YDFT and started to think of ways in which they can better the situation for the youth. However, care givers have also discussed the hardships and challenges they face that can affect their performance and relationship with the youth. Those problems include frequent changing of caregivers (affecting relationships established with youth), not having enough authority or power to take certain decisions, not being paid enough, and not having resources to properly manage the youth.

Media campaign

- A primary activity in the advocacy campaign was to raise the awareness of media representatives on the negative consequences of using discriminatory terminology and promote the positive portrayal of YDFT. This took place through two media workshops held in February and March 2016. Following the workshops, it was noticed that some organizations were still using discriminatory terminology in their reporting. As a result, the IRCKHF developed an infographic that outlines discriminatory labels as well as the positive terminology. These were then sent to the editors in chief of the major media outlets along with a letter highlighting the discrimination faced by YDFT, the impact that negative terminology has on them and the importance of eliminating such labels.

- **Impact:** During the period that followed change was noticed. Overall, it can be said that prior to the campaign launch 70% of the articles contained discriminatory terms such as (foundling, of unknown origin), and 30% of the articles contained terms such as (infant, newborn). After the campaign, there was a significant drop in use of discriminatory terminology as 55% of the articles contained terms such as (foundling, of unknown origin) and 45% of the articles contained terms such as (infant, newborn, deprived of family ties). It should be noted though that 12% of these articles committed to using the suggested term 'deprived of family ties' and this was mainly from the independent newspaper Al-Ghad.

Social media campaign

- With the aim of raising awareness on the multi-faceted discrimination faced by YDFT in the Jordanian society, the IRCKHF partnered with Humans of Amman, a local initiative that documents Jordanians' experiences through photography and short stories.

- Humans of Amman agreed to publish a series of stories from a group of YDFT, narrated in first person, in September, 2016. The stories tackled discrimination in the national number, marriage, work and other related themes, as experienced by the youth themselves. It was ensured that identities remained anonymous and protected.

Interactive play (1)

The IRCKHF partnered with the National Center for Culture and Arts (NCCA) and commissioned the creation and performance of an interactive play entitled "ولدت لأكون". This work was designed to raise awareness among the audience of the many ways YDFT regularly encounter discrimination. The play was based on the findings of the research and YDFT who participated in the peer research revised the script before it was finalized.

At the end of the play, audience members were invited to participate in the action by a facilitator through discussing the issues presented and posing solutions and alternatives. The play was held 5 times in different locations including universities.

Interactive play (2)

Impact: Audience members whether mid-aged to elderly people or students at universities were highly engaged with the plays and have participated in the discussion that followed, they had comments, questions, and suggestions that created dialogue. Many of the audience members were surprised and said they did not think that YDFT suffer from such discrimination.

Most people were highly moved by different scenes but especially by the scene that involves marriage. While most audience members were motivated by their sympathy towards this group, an important comment was raised by an audience member which was that these youth should be fully integrated into society and empowered not out of sympathy, but because it is one of their basic human rights to live in a safe and nurturing environment just like any other citizen.

FADFED
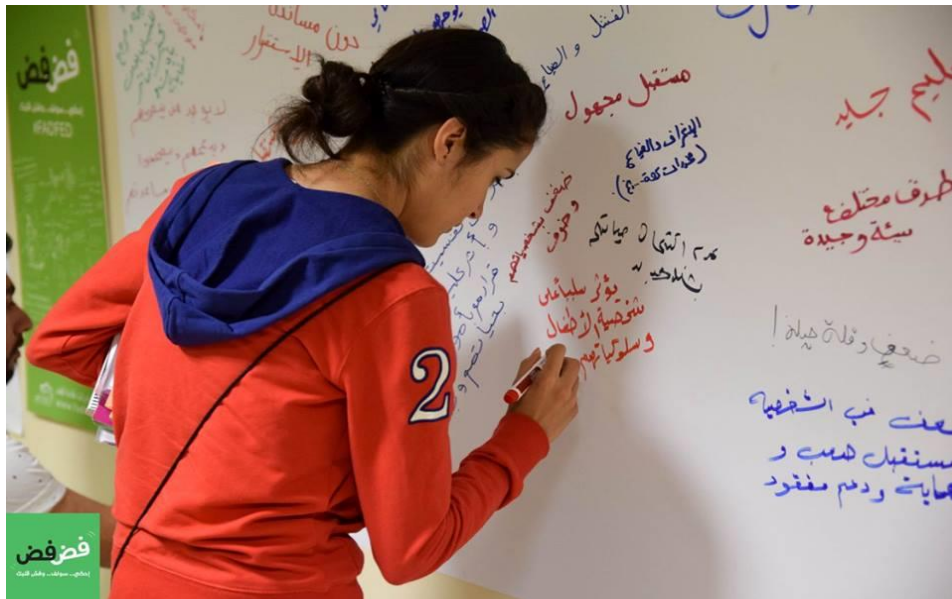
FADFED conducted five research events at each performance of the 'Born to Be' play, gathering public opinion from the audience before and after the event. At each venue, FADFED personnel hung collection papers in an area adjacent to the performance space, allowing audience members to participate as they entered and exited the theater area.

Events were open to the public with certain individuals or groups invited specifically by IRCKHF. The composition of the audiences, therefore, varied across the event: some audiences were mostly university students, for instance, while others were generationally diverse.
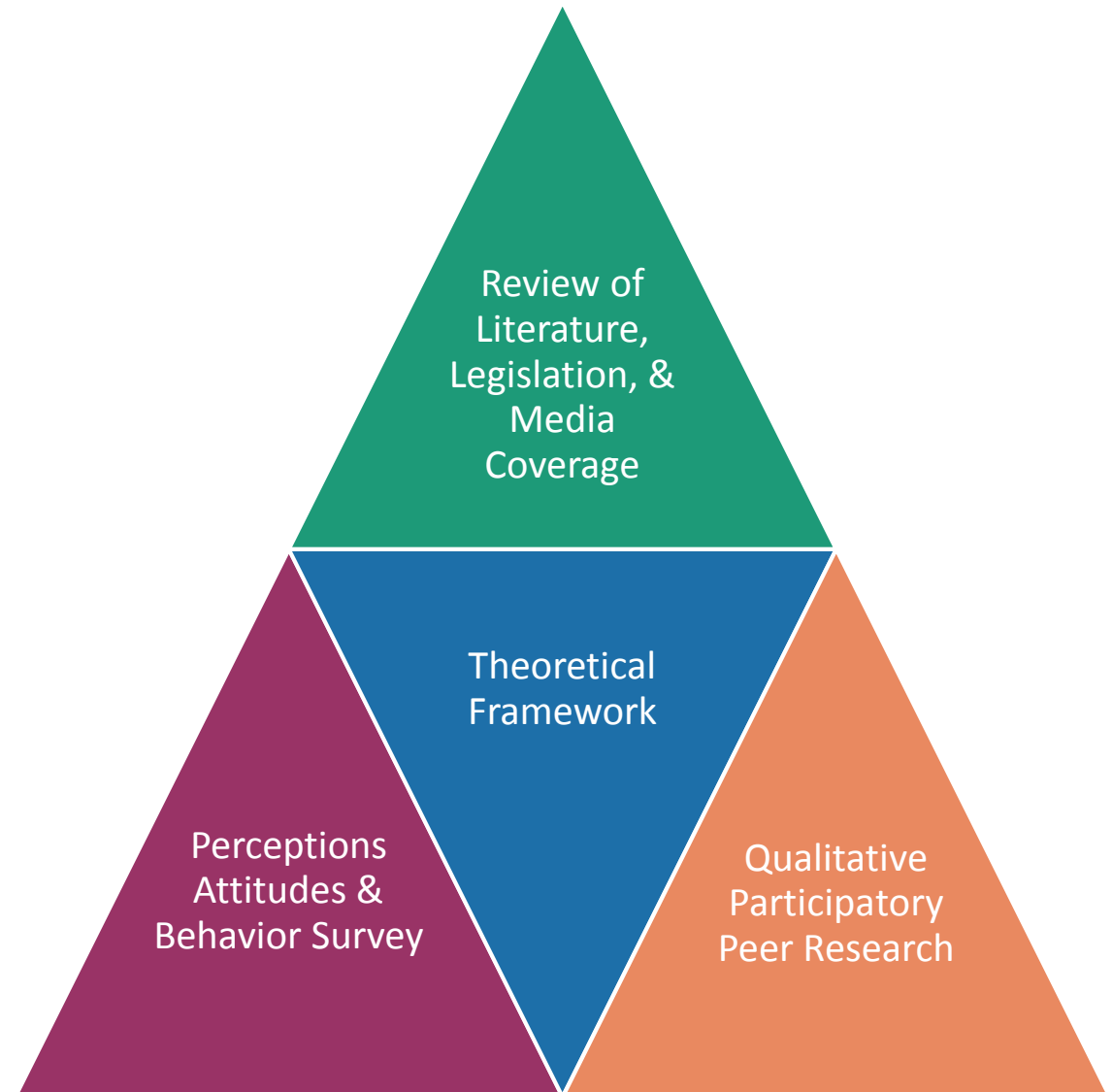
Annex: About the Project

About the project

In 2013, IRCKHF participated in the Children's Rights Committee's Review of Jordan in the pre-sessional working group reviewing the State's progress in upholding their agreement to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). While it is apparent that many developments took place in the protection of the rights of children in Jordan, there are still forms of discrimination that need to be addressed, including gender stereotypes, the right to nationality, and specific issues for children in alternative care.

Building on IRCKHF experience in research and advocacy on behalf of the rights of children and youth in Jordan and the region, and with the support of a Democracy and Governance Grant from FHI360 and USAID, this project was designed to address the discrimination and challenges facing this vulnerable group of youth, and more specifically, after they leave the protection of alternative care.

Methodology: Research

The first component of the project was research. The research identified the various forms of discrimination faced by YDFT in Jordan. It comprised of a legislative, literature and media review, a quantitative survey with society and qualitative participatory research with YDFT.

Review of Literature, Legislation, & Media Coverage

Theoretical Framework

Perceptions Attitudes & Behavior Survey

Qualitative Participatory Peer Research

Participatory action research

Participatory action research or peer research was an important component of the project. It allowed the researchers to consider challenges as perceived by the youth themselves and ensured that YDFT and care leavers are part of the data collection, analysis and validation of the results, therefore allowing them to voice their opinions in every part of the process.

In cooperation with Sakeena, the IRCKHF gathered a team of 12 care leavers to attend a three day training retreat in Madaba. This group was trained to implement a number of peer research tools. The aim was to prepare them to become a peer-research team that would later conduct data collection with 22 fellow care leavers and 22 in-care youth

Perceptions, attitudes & behaviors survey with society

A crucial aspect to consider in this project was the attitudes and perceptions of Jordanian society towards YDFT. The survey aimed to assess and explore the manner in which Jordanian society regards different groups of YDFT including:

- Youth with one or both parents deceased

- Youth from broken homes

- Youth with unknown parents

- Youth with known mothers and unknown fathers

- The society survey was completed by 600 participants; 51.8% males and 48.2% females. 98.8% of respondents lived in an urban area and 12.5% in a rural area and came from the center, north and south of Jordan. The ages of respondents ranged between 18 and 74.

Methodology: Research

The research was written up in two volumes:

Volume one: the first volume of the research included the desk review. It looked at legislation, literature and media to ensure that the research is built on and further develops current knowledge. This also allowed for the key elements to be identified and analyzed to inform the design, implementation and analysis of the primary research.

Volume two: the second volume of the research constituted the primary research incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative component was based on peer research with YDFT and ensured that they are part of the data collection, analysis and validation of the results. The quantitative research was based on a Perceptions, Attitudes and Behaviors Survey with society members in order to measure their perceptions towards this target group. All the results were analyzed using the 'Social Identity Theory' as a guiding theoretical framework.

Methodology: Advocacy

Once the information has been identified, the second component of the project was advocacy and awareness. This component aimed to use the findings of the research and mobilize the key stakeholders involved in order to reduce the social and legal discrimination faced by YDFT. The advocacy campaign had the following objectives:

- **Creating a network of civil society organizations** which provide services for care leavers in Jordan and ensuring effective coordination between the network and the MOSD. Additionally, developing a **Care Leavers Kit** which provides care leavers with all the information they require to start their independent life upon graduation.

- **Raising awareness of society members** using traditional and social media on all forms of discrimination that YDFT face in different aspects of life including education, work, accommodation, relationships and marriage.

- **Replacing the discriminatory labels** used to describe children and youth deprived of family ties including 'unknown origin' and 'children of sin' with positive terminology.

- Working with the Ministry of Social Development and caregivers on highlighting and **promoting the important role that caregivers** play in shaping the characters, lives and futures of youth living in care and preparing them for their full transition into society.