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THE IMPACT OF SUPPORTIVE ADULTS WHILE TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER CARE TO INDEPENDENCE AMONG SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY FOSTER YOUTH

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THE IMPACT OF SUPPORTIVE ADULTS WHILE TRANSITIONING FROM
FOSTER CARE TO INDEPENDENCE AMONG SAN BERNARDINO
COUNTY FOSTER YOUTH

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Beth Blankenship Barker
Alicia Renee Washington

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether the presence of a supportive adult in the life of a youth transitioning out of foster care impacts the likelihood that the youth experiences homelessness, teenage pregnancy, drug or alcohol addiction, or incarceration in San Bernardino County. Understanding the impact of a supportive adult, or mentor, on youth transitioning from foster care to independence would allow the social workers to more strategically plan for a successful exit from state care. This study will use public data collected from the federally mandated survey for the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Data was analyzed to determine if a correlation exists between having a supportive adult and the four aforementioned negative outcomes. The results showed that the four negative consequences examined occurred less frequently with individuals who identified as having a supportive adult in their lives. However, the differences demonstrated by the data were not statistically significant. Further research needs to examine the effect of mentoring on youth transitioning out of foster care.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In 2014 almost 25,000 youth “aged out” or were emancipated from the foster care system in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). These youth were not reunited with their biological families nor were they successfully adopted. Thus, they proceed into adulthood without the benefit of a permanent familial support system. These youth are, in effect, left to navigate the adult world alone.

The end of adolescence is a volatile time, even in the best of circumstances. In contemporary American society the period of time from ages 18-25 is so distinct from both adolescence and full-blown adulthood, it has been conceptualized as a new developmental stage, emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This period consists of a lot of exploration, concerning both identity and life possibilities (Arnett, 2000). Not only does their age and life stage make them vulnerable, but individuals who have aged out of the foster care system are at a distinct disadvantage in many areas, including completion of high school, coping with mental illness and/or substance abuse, finding employment, earning a livable wage, and finding appropriate housing (Pecora et al., 2006). Interestingly, when compared to other disadvantaged youth (those who have been involved

with the child welfare system but did not emancipate from foster care), there is no difference in rates of involvement with the justice system (Shook et al., 2012).

Cunningham & Diversi (2012) set out to capture the experiences of individuals emancipating from foster care through semi-structured interviews in addition to participant observation. This ethnographic approach was used because often time's youth in the foster care system develop a distrust of adults and researchers did not want this attitude to affect their data. This study revealed that emancipating youth have several fears. Economic insecurity was a common theme. One youth stated:

I was on my own night and day, trying to figure out what I was going to eat, where I was going to wash my clothes, where I would work, and watching out formyself at night, you know, staying safe (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012, p. 591).

These researchers point out that the problem is not with the individuals growing up in the foster care system, but with the system itself and its inability to consciously create an adequate safety net for these individuals (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012).

It is important to address this deficit for society as a whole. Instead of funding programs for homeless youth or financially assisting young people who cannot obtain sufficient employment to sustain themselves, these individuals should be assisted to become independent. At this point they will no longer be a drain on society's resources but rather contribute to those resources through

productive employment and financial independence.

In an effort to counteract the significant challenges faced by emancipated foster youth, Congress created the Title IV-E Independent Living Program in 1986, which provided states with money to fund programs that would prepare foster youth for life after emancipation. In 1999 that program was replaced by the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which increased the funding for these programs (Mares, 2010). Because there is so much federal money spent on these programs to prepare foster youth for the transition to adulthood, it is important to understand which aspects of these programs are most beneficial as felt by the youth involved and which aspects contribute to the most successful outcomes. Typically these programs feature both educational elements, such as classroom learning, and mentor relationships between the foster youth and an encouraging adult.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the Impact of Supportive Adults while Transitioning from Foster Care to Independence among San Bernardino County Foster Youth.

Transitioning foster youth are at risk for a number of poor outcomes in comparison to their same-age peers. Many foster youth must transition into adulthood while simultaneously transitioning out of foster care. Moreover,

because foster youth were removed from parents due to maltreatment, most will have experienced some form of trauma and won't have ongoing parental, emotional, social and financial support during the transition from foster care to independency. (Hines & Lemon, 2006). Supportive relationships are potential strategies for preventing poor outcomes among foster youth. The utilization of extended support from formal and informal supports to improve outcomes for foster youth has grown in interest (Hines & Lemon, 2006). Resilience research has consistently identified the presence of a supportive adult and caring non-parental adult in the lives of youth who has succeeded despite adversity and hardship. A consistent finding in the evaluation of research is that resilient youth have some form of a caring and supportive non-parental adult in their lives. Supportive adults offer trusting relationships, serving as a role model, and assist youth in acquiring independent living skills.

Research has targeted at risk youth and mentor program outcomes, but has lacked an understanding for characteristics of older foster youth's supportive networks and programs that may assist in buffering these youth from poor outcomes upon leaving foster care (Reilly, 2003). Research has lacked an understanding of the role of formal and informal supports and the promotion of resiliency among transitioning foster youth. There is some evidence that older adolescent foster youth may have special needs that should be addressed if the supporting relationship reaches success. Grossman and Rhodes reported that youth who experienced abuse were more likely to have shorter relationships with

supportive adults in comparison to youth who have not experienced maltreatment in birth homes (Grossman & Rhodes, n.d.). The authors speculate that youth who have experienced maltreatment may be less trusting of formal and informal supports, thus, it may be more difficult to establish supportive relationships with caring adults (Hines & Lemon, 2006).

Research Methods

This study is best addressed by gathering and analyzing secondary data. We obtained access to data gathered by San Bernardino County from the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Secondary Data Analysis

Public law 106-169 established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. In section 477 of the Social Security Act, which provides States with flexible funding to assist foster youth in transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency. In conjunction with funding the law also requires that each County Administration of Children and Families to develop a data collection system to track the Independent Living Services provided to youth, and to develop outcome measures that may be used to assess the State's performance in operating the Independent Living Programs throughout each county. The law requires Administration of Children and Families to impose a penalty of one to five percent of the State's annual allotment on any state that fails to comply with

the State's reporting requirements of 80% completion of each cohort of youth and young adults.

States started gathering data for National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) on October 1st 2010. The NYTD requires that states perform two types of data collection activities. First, the states are required to collect identifiable information on each youth who receives Independent Living Services (ILP) paid for or provided by the state agency. Second, states are required to collect demographic and outcome information on youth in foster care who the state will then continue to follow over a period of four years. The information is then used by the Administration of Children and Family Services (ACF) to track participation of ILP services and outcomes of foster youth.

Through NYTD, the federal government mandates states to document the ILP services and supports they provide to all youth in 11 broad categories:

independent living needs assessment, academic support, post-secondary educational support; career preparation; employment programs or vocational training; budget and financial management; housing education and home management training; health education and risk prevention; family support and healthy marriage education; mentoring; and supervised independent living. States will also report financial assistance they provide, including assistance for education, room and board and other aid (About NYTD, page 1).

States survey youth regarding six outcomes: financial self-sufficiency which includes paid or unpaid work experience, homelessness, educational attainment which offers a broad category of option that range from currently attending high school to college degree attainment. The survey also asks the youth to identify positive connections with adults, asks about high-risk behaviors that may include incarceration, and utilization of health insurance (About NYTD, 2012).

The NYTD survey offers a series of questions that often provide correlations to poor or improved foster youth outcomes. For the purpose of research, the focus question inquires if foster youth currently have a supportive adult other than their social worker that they can receive advice from. The responses may provide an understanding to poor or improved outcomes for youth transitioning out of care that either have or don't have a caring supportive adult in their life.

States are required to conduct the first survey on or before the youth's 17th birthday, which is the baseline population, then the second identical is offered around their 19th birthday and lastly on or before their 21st birthday. The outcomes are tracked at age 17, 19 and 21 whether or not the young adult receives ILP services. Depending on the state's ILP eligible youth, the state may conduct a random sample of the baseline population of the 17- year olds that participate so they are able to follow a smaller group as they reach the age of 21.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The need to conduct the study arose from the rate of NYTD data results among San Bernardino County Transitional Aged Foster Youth. The survey is administered due to federal mandates, and lacks utilization among Social Workers. Child Welfare Departments could implement the survey as a best practice tool for social work engagement throughout San Bernardino County CFS. The research would promote improved tools for utilization of family finding, formal and informal supports, and mentoring programs that promote successful transitions for foster youth. The recognition of utilized or underutilized supports may administer concrete planning for social workers or the need for employed staff whose role would be to assist youth in building permanent connections with caring adults before exiting foster care.

The research may promote stability and permanency throughout placements. Social Workers may attempt to better assist youth when selecting a placement. Youth may experience decreased AWOLS, seven-day notices, and increased commitment from foster parents/ supports. Young people who have stability in care less likely to become mobile and are more likely to have increased sources of support (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006).

The research may promote an evaluation of the Independent Living Programs services in San Bernardino County. San Bernardino County currently offers 12-week series of life skill courses, but lacks follow-up once the courses are completed. The results may promote a need for supportive adult relationships

before foster youth reach adolescence. It is hypothesized that San Bernardino County foster youth who have supportive adults in their life are more likely to gain independency, confidence, and experience long lasting relationships, in comparison to foster youth who don't have supportive adults and in turn experience homelessness, teenage pregnancy, alcohol or drug addiction, and incarceration.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a challenging time for many youth. However, this period is even more difficult for youth exiting the foster care system to proceed into adulthood independently. Many researchers have studied this vulnerable population during this crucial period. Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been conducted, each shedding a new light on the successes and failures of the transitioning youth.

Studies That Have Explored Mentoring Between Emancipating Foster Youth and Non-Parental Adults

The importance of strong relationships with adults for emancipating foster youth is a repeated theme in the literature (Curry & Abrams, 2014; Lawler et al., 2014; Osterling & Hines, 2006). However, it also presents a paradox. Aging out foster youth are taught, on one hand, that they must strive for independence and the ability to take care of oneself. Conversely, a mentor relationship teaches youth the importance of interdependence and maintaining connections with

helping adults (Curry & Abrams, 2014). A successful mentoring relationship will elucidate the interaction between independence and interdependence.

Several studies have shown that youth emancipating from the foster care system feel strongly that having a mentor is very important to them (Geenen & Powers, 2007; Osterling & Hines, 2006; Ahrens et al., 2011). Through interviews with transitioning foster youth as well as social workers working in that field, it was agreed that these mentoring relationships were more important than accessing formal services. The lack of these relationships resulted in many youth feeling isolated and disconnected as they transitioned into adulthood (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Youth participating in the Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence also stated that mentors provided a supportive and trusting relationship, served as role models, and assisted youth in acquiring skills important for independent living, 93.8% of the participants agreeing that mentoring was “very important” (Osterling & Hines, 2006).

During emerging adulthood, asset accumulation is associated with higher rates of self-sufficiency. Since most youth receive family support to effectively build assets during late adolescence, individuals in foster care need to rely on mentors for provide advice and support in this area. The data showed that having a natural mentor who served as a role model was associated with having a bank account (Greeson et al., 2010).

Whether a mentoring relationship is formally created or the result of natural life circumstances does not appear to affect its effectiveness. Both types

of mentoring relationships equally appeared to help the youth resolve conflicts in a healthy manner, set boundaries within other relationships, improved feelings of self-worth, and assisted with work and educational goals (Ahrens et al., 2011).

Some researchers found that the method of conception of the mentoring relationship, whether it is formal or informal, did not matter as much as the support and training offered to those mentors. Mentors should be comprehensively trained so that they are prepared for the unique issues of youth emancipating from the foster care system. Mentors should be offered support to help them maintain a positive relationship even when the youth is going through difficult moments. Additionally, it should be explained to the involved foster parents how vital the mentor relationship. This way the foster parents can support the mentor and encourage the youth in their care to seek support from the mentor (Scannapieco & Painter, 2014).

However, not all studies supported the idea that mentoring relationships are influential. When comparing youths' experiences as part of the Massachusetts Outreach Program for Youth in Intensive Foster Care, which contains a mentorship component, with those of young adults who were merely provided minimal child welfare services, researchers found that there was no increased social support felt by the mentored youth (Greeson et al., 2015).

Many studies that investigated the effect of a mentoring relationship on young adults emancipating from foster care did not take into consideration the length of said relationship. However, when this was considered, the length of the

mentoring relationship appeared to positively correspond to the positive effect on the youth. Researchers found that foster youth who had a mentoring relationship which lasted longer than one year had fewer depressive symptoms than their counterparts whose mentor relationship was shorter in duration (Munson & McMillen, 2009; Lawler et al., 2014).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

In order to examine the experiences of aged out foster youth two main theories must be considered. "Emerging Adulthood," a developmental theory developed by Arnett in the later part of last century, was proposed to explain the demographic shifts that were taking place in the United States with youth aged 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000). Since emancipated foster youth are ejected from the child welfare system precisely at this time it is important to consider their experiences adjusting to independent life through Arnett's conceptualization. Additionally, the theory of social support and its relationship to health and well-being will elucidate the importance of a mentoring relationship for youth aging out of foster care. Social support from both natural and programmatic mentors can be considered a substitute for assistance adolescents typically receive from their parents (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging Adulthood

Beginning after the Second World War life in the United States began to change at an exponential rate. People began getting married later and having children later. More Americans graduated from college. Adolescents who would have joined the workforce directly after graduation from high school were now delaying their large life decisions about careers, family, and home ownership. Jeffery Jensen Arnett identified this period of time, between the ages of 18 and 25, as a new developmental stage, which he termed “emerging adulthood.” No longer was there a quick, identifiable shift from adolescence to adulthood. According to Arnett, this change takes place over several years (Arnett, 2000). However, adolescents in the foster care system do not have this drawn out luxury. Unfortunately their reality does not fit easily into Arnett’s theory of “emerging adulthood.” Their change from adolescence to adulthood comes with the rapidity of a light switch turning off: emancipation, the end of state care and services, propel a foster youth into adulthood overnight (Berzin, et al., 2014).

The demographic area Arnett found most cogent during this transitional period was residential status. Not only do individuals in this developmental stage have a high rate of residential change, but for many this means moving back into the family home several times before the individual is able to support himself independently (Arnett, 2000). One emancipating foster youth speaks to this point:

I wanna be a kid again. But reality quickly snaps me back. My friends, they have a lot of family support, so they're making those mistakes...they have their family to back them. I don't have the luxury of making those types of mistakes (Samuels & Pryce, 2007, page 1204).

This trend directly affects aged out foster youth who do not have any "family" home to which they can return until they are able to support themselves independently. Thus, programs targeted to help these individuals must provide services and support that simulate that which would be provided by a biological family.

For many American young adults a period of instability and identity exploration is viewed as a welcome opportunity to try on different hats and decide which one they would like to pursue. But for emancipating foster youth, instability has often defined their entire childhood and adolescence. Now, when finally given more control over their own lives, instability is sought to be avoided (Berzin, et al., 2014). So, although most adolescents experience a period of instability, those who are emerging from the foster care system view it very differently than do those in the general population.

Social Support Theory

Another theoretical model used to understand young adults emancipating from foster care is "social support." Social support has been shown to benefit one's health and general well being. This social support can incorporate emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal

support. Emotional support provides feelings of love and trust to an individual. Instrumental support provides concrete goods or services. Informational support renders assistance in problem solving and crisis aversion. Finally, appraisal support affirms the decisions and actions made by an individual (Lanford, et al., 1997). Typically parents provide the social support that facilitates a youth's transition to independence. It is important that independent living programs for emancipating foster youth replicate this support to move the youth toward successful outcomes.

Unfortunately, youth in the foster care system often lack adequate social support. Instability rules their lives: there are often many changes in placements, schools, and even caseworkers. Through all of this chaos and disorder, foster youth learn to fend for themselves, not willing to risk the disappointment of being let down by someone else. In fact, many youth in the foster care system view reliance on others as a negative. Berzin et al. found that the youth actually defined adulthood as "not asking for help" (Berzin et al., 2014). Even if a mentoring relationship is presented to an emancipating youth, he may not be in a mental position to recognize the opportunity for the positive one that it is.

Summary

Many studies have examined the transition into independence from foster care. Researchers have investigated the importance of having a mentor from the emancipating youths' perspective, whether length of the mentoring relationship is important, and whether differing types of mentor relationships lead to different results for the young adult. However, there is a lack of research that explores whether having a mentor can actually be correlated to a lowered likelihood of negative outcomes such as homelessness, drug or alcohol addiction, teenage pregnancy, or incarceration. This study begins to fill in that gap.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study focused on the young adults who were in the process of emancipating from the foster care system in San Bernardino County in 2015. San Bernardino County Children and Family Services Independent Living Program is mandated by the federal government to collect data from the emancipating youth in San Bernardino County using the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey. The NYTD provides the first national snapshot of service delivery efforts of State Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) agencies aimed at assisting youth in making transition to adulthood. This study used the data collected by this instrument to examine the relationship between having a mentor and several negative outcomes such as homelessness, substance addiction, involvement with the judicial system, and teenage pregnancy.

Study Design

This was an exploratory study that aimed to answer the question: What is the impact of having a supportive adult while transitioning from foster care to independence in San Bernardino County on homelessness, teenage pregnancy,

alcohol or drug addiction, and incarceration? Quantitative data from a federal survey was examined to explore correlations between the presence of a supportive adult and four negative outcomes experienced by the youth: homelessness, teenage pregnancy, alcohol or drug addiction, and incarceration. This approach was selected because the NYTD is a vast source of information. Its validity is demonstrated by the fact that the federal government evaluates state-run Independent Living Programs funded by the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program through data collected by this instrument.

Sampling

In the Federal Fiscal Year 2013, San Bernardino County CFS identified a random sample of youth age 17 who received more than one documented ILP Service. A child must be in an out of home placement on his or her 16th birthday, to remain eligible for ILP services. The current cohort is encompassed of youth who were in an out of home placement and or on probation during his or her 16th birthday.

Of the sample, 176 youth age 21 were eligible to participate in the NYTD survey. San Bernardino County CFS completed 155 of the surveys (88%) of the federal surveys with eligible participants. The remaining participants were missing, AWOL, unable to locate, incarcerated, declined to participate, incapacitated, or dead.

San Bernardino County CFS is currently conducting the same survey with the previous 17 & 19-year-old participants who are now 21 years old. San

Bernardino County CFS' Peer and Family Assistant (PFA) Alicia Washington is currently tasked with conducting the surveys among the current cohort. The start date of the current survey was October 1, 2015 and will end on March 31, 2016. The Current cohort has two deadlines, March 31, 2016 and September 30, 2016. The deadline is reflected by the youth's birthday. Ninety-three of the 176 participants have birthdays that are before March 31, 2016 and require completion by this deadline. The second group's birthdays are after the first deadline of March 31, 2016 and are before September 30, 2016.

The assigned PFA is committed to making satisfactory efforts to reach each eligible participant. Some of the efforts includes mailing/e-mailing surveys, utilization of public assistance database (C-IV), social media, visiting the last known address, calls, social worker updates, in care status, etc. Upon completion of the survey participants are given a \$75.00 incentive for NYTD survey participation. Each time the youth participates in the survey the incentive is increased by \$25.00. The current cohort has an opportunity to participate in the survey at the age of 21; at that time the youth will receive \$100.00 incentive for their participation.

Data Collection and Instruments

The NYTD survey offers a series of questions that often provide correlations to poor or improved foster youth outcomes. For the purpose of research, the focus question inquires if foster youth currently have a supportive adult other than their social worker that they can receive advice from. The

responses provided an understanding of poor or improved outcomes for youth transitioning out of care that either have or do not have a caring supportive adult in their life.

This study examined data collected by the NYTD survey administered to young adults in San Bernardino County. Because the survey preexisted this study, its wording dictated how the variables were defined.

Independent Variable

The independent variable is the presence of a mentor or a supportive adult in the life of an emancipating foster youth. In order to be counted as having a supportive adult, an individual would answer “yes” to the NYTD survey question: “Currently is there at least one supportive adult in your life, other than your caseworker, to whom you can go for advice or emotional support?” This did not capture any details of the mentoring relationship, nor did it identify if the relationship was the result of natural circumstances or whether it was formed as part of an Independent Living Program mandate.

Dependent Variables

Four negative outcomes were identified by the NYTD survey and were examined for a correlational relationship to the presence of a mentor (Passavant, n.d.). The following are operational definitions for the four dependent variables in this study. Homelessness is defined as an answer of “yes” to the following question: “In the past two years, were you homeless at any time?” Having a substance addiction is defined as an answer of “yes” to the following survey

question: “In the past two years, did you refer yourself, or had someone else referred you for an alcohol or drug abuse assessment or counseling?”

Involvement with the judicial system is defined as an answer of “yes” to the following survey question: “In the past two years, were you confined in jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention facility, in connection with allegedly committing a crime?” And finally, teenage pregnancy is defined as an answer of “yes” to the following survey question: “In the past two years, did you give birth to or father any children that were born?” All of the independent and dependent variables in this study were measured as nominal variables as there are only two answer options: yes or no (Passavant, n.d.).

Procedures

The law requires Administration of Children and Families to impose a penalty of one to five percent of the State’s annual allotment on any state that fails to comply with the State’s reporting requirements of 80% completion of each cohort of youth and young adults.

The State of California compiled a list of updated survey outcomes. A request for data representing San Bernardino County was sent to the National Data Archive for Child Abuse and Neglect. This entailed submitting an application and becoming registered data users. After official approval and verification, the subset was released for the purpose of conducting this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study utilizes secondary data that was previously collected by the San Bernardino Children and Family Services Independent Living Program and reported to the Children's Bureau, and requires neither informed consent nor debriefing statements specifically for this study.

Data Analysis

All of the data collected by the NYTD survey is nominal in nature. A correlation between the independent variable and dependent variables can be identified, but any additional analysis as to causation cannot be determined, as this would require follow-up survey questions and/or individual interviews. A correlation between the independent variable and each dependent variable was determined by performing a series of chi-square tests for independence.

Summary

San Bernardino County CFS would value the research outcomes. The current outcomes are measured throughout the state but are not analyzed by particular counties. The correlations may provide insight on improved outcomes for youth who have a supportive adult in their lives. The results may promote improved ILP services throughout San Bernardino County CFS. San Bernardino County CFS may oppose interviews with youth who are currently in care, but may support research that offers opportunities for growth and may increase the

use of permanency toolkits that youth and social workers are able to utilize while the youth is in care.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Table 1 describes the demographics of the former 120 foster youth who participated in the NYTD survey. The results show that the gender was fairly evenly split, with 46.7% of the participants being female and 53.3% being male. The largest ethnic group of youth surveyed identified as Hispanic (44.2%). The next largest ethnic group was African-American, making up 25.8% of the participants, closely followed by non-Hispanic whites (24.2%). Less than one percent of the participants were Asian, while the remaining 5% identified as more than one race or did not select an ethnic category on the survey. At the time of the survey 69.2% of the participants had graduated high school or obtained a GED. Less than 2% identified having a vocational certificate, associate degree, or a higher degree. “None of the above” was identified by 10.8% while 15% of the surveyed youth did not indicate their highest level of education.

Table 1. Demographics of Former Foster Youth Who Completed the National Youth in Transition Database Survey.

Variable	Frequencies (n)	Percentages (%)
Gender:		
male	56	46.7

female	64	53.3
Race or Ethnicity:		
White	29	24.2
Black/African-American	31	25.8
Asian	1	.8
More than 1 race	2	1.7
Hispanic	53	44.2
Race unknown	4	3.3
Highest Level of Education:		
High School/GED	83	69.2
Vocational Certificate	2	1.7
Associate Degree	2	1.7
Higher Degree	1	.8
None of the Above	13	10.8
Declined	1	.8
Blank	18	15

Table 2 shows how many participants identified being homeless, suffering from substance abuse, having interactions with the criminal justice system, and having children. In each of these categories, the participants are separated into two groups: those who have identified as having a mentor and those who did not identify as having a mentor.

Almost one quarter of the participants identified as being homeless at any time in the past two years. Of those participants who identified having a mentor in their life 23.7% also identified as being homeless in the past two years. Of those participants who did not identify as having a mentor, 33.3% answered that they have been homeless in the past two years.

Only 7.9% of the total participants identified as having been referred for an alcohol or drug abuse assessment or counseling. All of those participants who answered affirmatively to this question also identified as having a mentor (7.9%). There were no participants who identified themselves as not having a mentor that answered in the affirmative to this question.

When asked about having any involvement with the criminal justice system, 13.7% of all the participants surveyed answered in the affirmative. Of those who identified as having a mentor in their life 12.9% also identified having been involved in the criminal justice system. Of those participants who identified themselves as not having a mentor 22.2% identified themselves as having been involved in the criminal justice system.

Almost one third of the total participants identified themselves as being the parent of at least one biological child. Of those participants who identified as having a mentor 31.2% also identified as being a parent. Of those participants who identified as not having a mentor 44.4% identified as having a biological child.

Table 2. Negative Outcomes of Participants Comparing Those with a Mentor to Those Without a Mentor

Variable	With Supportive Adult frequency (percentage)	Without Supportive Adult frequency (percentage)

Homeless		
yes	22 (23.7)	3 (33.3)
no	71 (76.3)	6 (66.7)
Substance Abuse		
yes	8 (8.7)	0 (0)
no	84 (91.3)	9 (100)
Criminal Justice Involvement		
yes	12 (12.9)	2 (22.2)
no	81 (87.1)	7 (77.8)
Have Children		
yes	29 (31.2)	4 (44.4)
no	64 (68.8)	5 (55.6)

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study's findings show that youth transitioning out of the foster care system who identified as having a supportive adult in their life are at a lower risk for three out of the four negative outcomes investigated as compared to individuals who identified as not having a supportive adult in their life. Although none of the findings were statistically significant, which could be the result of the small sample size used, there is still an identifiable trend that supports the idea that having a mentor protects a transitioning youth from several negative outcomes after exiting foster care.

The surveyed youth were asked if they had ever been homeless. The study's findings showed that those without a supportive adult in their lives were ten percent more likely to have answered in the affirmative to this question. Dworsky and Courtney (2013) found that between 31% and 41% of youth who aged out of the foster care system have been homeless at least once. In this study, this number is consistent with those individuals who did not have a supportive adult in their lives, which was 33.3%. However, the youth who did identify as having a supportive adult had a homelessness rate of 23.7% which is much lower.

This study also investigated the relationship between the presence of a supportive adult in an aged-out foster youth's life and the negative outcome of the youth's involvement with the criminal justice system. Without stable parenting and discipline provided by a permanent family along with a host of other factors, it is not surprising youth who aged out of the foster care system without ever receiving a permanent placement have much higher involvement with the criminal justice system than those individuals who did not age out of the foster care system. Shook et al. (2013) found that 24% of the aged out foster youth in their study had involvement with the criminal justice system. This study found that 22.2% of those participants who did not have a supportive adult had some involvement with the criminal justice system. This number is consistent with the study conducted by Shook et al. (2013). However, in this study, of those youth who had a supportive adult in their life, only 12.9% had been involved with the criminal justice system. This is a substantial difference and demonstrates the positive effect of having a mentor when aging out of the foster care system.

Another negative outcome that was examined in this study was whether the surveyed youth who aged out of foster care were already parents at the time the survey was completed at which time they were 21 years old. Although arguably the outcome of early parenthood is not necessarily negative, maintaining one's independence and pursuing a higher education are considerably harder when there are dependents involved. The rate of early parenthood was high for aged out foster youth in general. However, the

presence of a supportive adult seems to lower one's chance of parenting a child by the age of 21 by over 10%.

The only negative outcome that was examined by this study that did not show a decrease with the presence of a supportive adult was drug or alcohol addiction. This study found that 8.7% of the surveyed youth admitted to having been referred for substance abuse treatment or counseling while zero individuals who identified as not having a supportive adult answered in the affirmative. This study was confined to the wording on the NYTD survey, and thus the individuals were not asked whether they suffer from a drug or alcohol addiction, but rather if they have ever been referred to treatment. It is possible that surveyed individuals did not answer affirmatively to this question even if they identify as having a substance abuse problem simply because they have never been referred to treatment. In fact, it is possible that the supportive adult in the lives of some youth were the referring party. Thus, those individuals who do not have a supportive adult to suggest treatment or counseling might have honestly answered this question in the negative but their answer is not a reliable indicator of whether or not they suffer with a substance addiction. In fact, a reference for substance abuse treatment or counseling could be viewed as a positive outcome when compared to the situation of a youth who suffers from an addiction and is not getting any treatment. For these reasons, the results pertaining to the relationship of a supportive adult and substance addiction are not necessarily a reliable representation of the youths' actual experiences.

Limitations of the Study

This research study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small in comparison to the youth who initially participated in the survey at the age of 17. The other limitations include the youth's comprehension of the questionnaire, and the lack of an opportunity to follow-up with youth to gain clarity for responses. The sample size consisted of a total of 110 youth. Upon review of the survey, the questions often lacked an explanation. One example is depicted in the question which asks youth if they have self-referred or been referred for an alcohol or drug abuse assessment or counseling? Survey participants may not understand the question. The question solicited multiple responses. There was no opportunity to identify the youth, in that we weren't provided with identifiable information to ask for clarity for questions that may have impacted original responses to the initial survey questions. One survey question inquired about a supportive adult other than the youth's social worker. The survey didn't offer the definition of a supportive adult. The survey doesn't provide an opportunity for the youth to identify the supportive adult.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The survey is currently conducted by San Bernardino County's Peer and Family Assistants, and may serve as a tool for social workers. The survey results are encompassed with fundamental information that may provide SW's with an

opportunity to explore responses to questions that may potentially assist youth in transitioning from foster care to adulthood. San Bernardino's current mission is to provide safety, permanency and well-being for its families. Some of the questions offer an opportunity for the SW and youth to develop a goal in meeting and connecting with permanent life-long connections which ultimately promotes well-being among foster youth. The survey also provides an opportunity for SW's to assist the youth in accessing valuable resources. Some of the resources may include support in accessing housing, mental health and or educational opportunities. If the survey results were utilized by the social worker, the youth and social worker would potentially improve the youth's outcomes at an earlier age of 17 rather than accessing resources before a youth ages out of foster care.

This study supports a policy improvement concerning the age at which youth are eligible to participate in ILP services. Currently youth are eligible to participate at 16. However, the survey reveals that as early as age 17 transitioning youth are already experiencing negative outcomes which could potentially be avoided if they were receiving and identifying mentors at a younger age.

Further research should be conducted in order to better understand the effect mentors have on transitioning youth. Qualitative studies would allow the youth to explain the mentor's effect on their lives. Researchers could follow up with questions that provide insight to the youth's specific situation, thus going far beyond what a survey can measure. Additionally, broader quantitative studies

can provide larger sample sizes which may lead to statistically significant findings.

Conclusion

The study's findings showed that youth transitioning out of foster care who identified as having a supportive adult in their life tend to be at a lower risk for three out of negative outcomes when compared to peers who didn't identify a supportive adult in their life. The findings weren't statistically significant, which could have been for numerous reasons such as the sample size of NYTD participants, comprehension of the survey and the lack of an opportunity for follow-up. It also provides SW's with an opportunity to engage youth in their current stage of development. The recommendations for improved practice tools among SW's and ILP staff is that youth have an opportunity to take charge of aspects within their life. Empowering youth to take ownership of their life may encourage them to fulfill their transitional goals.

APPENDIX A

NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Currently are you employed full-time?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

NOTE: "Full-time" means working at least 35 hours per week at one or multiple jobs

2. Currently are you employed part-time?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

NOTE: "Part-Time" means working at least 1-34 hours per week at one or multiple jobs

3. In the past year, did you complete an apprenticeship, internship, or other on-the-job training, either paid or unpaid?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

NOTE: This can include specific trade skills like carpentry, auto-mechanics, office skills acquired to prepare you for employment. You did not need to be paid for the apprenticeship, internship or OJT

4. Currently are you receiving social security payments (Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or dependents' payments)?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This can include payment from the government for food, clothing and shelter because a parent or guardian is disabled

5. Currently are you using a scholarship, grant, stipend, student loan, voucher, or other type of educational financial aid to cover any educational expenses?
- Yes
 - No
 - Declined

Note: Student loan means a government-guaranteed, low interest loan for your post secondary education.

6. Currently are you receiving any periodic and/or significant financial resources or support from another source not previously indicated and excluding paid employment?
- Yes
 - No
 - Declined

Note: This does not include occasional gifts for birthday or graduations as an example. This does include funds from a legal settlement or child support paid directly to support you.

7. What is the highest educational degree or certification that you have received?
- High school diploma/GED
 - Vocational certificate
 - Vocational license
 - Associate's degree (e.g., A.A.)
 - Bachelor's degree (e.g., B.A. or B.S.)
 - Higher degree
 - None of the above
 - Declined

Note: Vocational Certificate – document showing you have been trained for a particular job
Vocational License – State or Local Government recognizes you as a qualified professional in a trade/business
Associate's Degree – a 2 year degree from a community college
Bachelor's Degree – a 4

year degree from a college or university Higher

Degree – Graduate Degree; Masters or

Doctorate

Select “None” of the above if you are still attending High School

8. Currently are you enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, post-high school vocational training, or college?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: You are considered enrolled even if the school is currently out of session (e.g., Spring break, Summer Vacation)

9. Currently is there at least one adult in your life, other than your caseworker, to whom you can go for advice or emotional support?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This excludes spouses, partners, boyfriends/girlfriends and current caseworkers but can include other adult relatives, parents or foster parents.

10. Have you ever been homeless? (This question is for the initial survey)

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In the past two years, were you homeless at any time? (This is for the follow up survey)

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This includes living in a car, on the street or staying in a homeless or temporary shelter

11. Have you ever referred yourself or has someone else referred you for an alcohol or drug abuse assessment or counseling? (This question is for the initial survey)

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In the past two years, did you refer yourself, or had someone else referred you for an alcohol or drug abuse assessment or counseling?

(This is for the follow up survey)

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This includes being referred by a social worker, school staff, physician, mental health worker, foster parent or other adult

12. Have you ever been confined in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention facility, in connection with allegedly committing a crime? (This question is for the initial survey)

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In the past two years, were you confined in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention facility, in connection with allegedly committing a crime? (This is for the follow up survey)

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: Crime includes a misdemeanor or felony that you allegedly committed

13. Have you ever given birth or fathered any children that were born?

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In the past two years, did you give birth to or father any children that were born?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: Child must have been born. If you are a male and do not know answer "No"

14. If you responded yes to the previous question, were you married to the child's other parent at the time each child was born?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: Answer "No" if you were not married to the other parent at the time at least one of the children in the above question was born. Skip this question if you answered "No" to the previous question

15. Currently are you on Medicaid [or use the name of the State's medical assistance program under title XIX]?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Declined

Note: This is a Health Insurance funded by the government

16. Currently do you have health insurance, other than Medicaid?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Declined

Note: This includes Health Insurance provided by employer or school or if you have purchased your own insurance or are covered in your parent's insurance plan. This also includes free health care.

17. Does your health insurance include coverage for medical services?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Declined

Note: Skip this question if you answered "No" to the question "Currently do you have health insurance, other than Medicaid?"

18. Does your health insurance include coverage for mental health services?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Declined

Note: Skip this question if you answered "No" to the question "Currently do you have health insurance, other than Medicaid?"

19. Does your health insurance include coverage for prescription drugs?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Declined

Note: Skip this question if you answered "No" to the question "Currently do you have health insurance, other than Medicaid?"

20. Currently are you receiving ongoing welfare payments from the government to support your basic needs? [The State may add and/or substitute the name(s) of the State's welfare program].

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This includes ongoing welfare payments from the government; do not include payments for specific purposes such as; unemployment insurance, child care subsidies, education assistance, food stamps or housing assistance

21. Currently are you receiving public food assistance?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This includes Food Stamps (Coupons or debit cards) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Programs

22. Currently are you receiving any sort of housing assistance from the government, such as living in public housing or receiving a housing voucher?

- Yes
- No
- Declined

Note: This includes housing provided by the government and housing vouchers to pay for part of the housing cost. This does not include payments from a Child Welfare Agency for room and board payments.

Passavant, W. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG2981.htm>

APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Beth Barker & Alicia Washington
Proposal Title The Impact of Supportive Adults While Transitioning
from Foster care to Independence Among San Bernardino County
SW 1644 Foster Youth

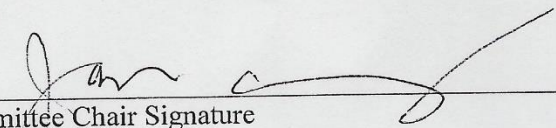
Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

- approved
 to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
 to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
 missing informed consent debriefing statement
 revisions needed in informed consent debriefing
 data collection instruments missing
 agency approval letter missing
 CITI missing
 revisions in design needed (specified below)

 4/12/16
Committee Chair Signature Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

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