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Extended Foster Care: The General Population's Perspective

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EXTENDED FOSTER CARE: THE GENERAL POPULATION'S
PERSPECTIVE

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

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

by
Laura Andrade
Daniela Alejandra Salinas
June 2015

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ABSTRACT

The following is a quantitative study, with a convenience sample of 117 adults, ranging in age from 18-73, to gather information about the public's perspective towards extended foster care (EFC) and emerging adulthood. Topics varied from when foster youth should emancipate to when emerging adult children should move out of their parents' homes. There is very little literature regarding the topic of EFC, which could impact the sustainability of this program as its objective is to help emerging adults transition more successfully into adulthood and out of the child welfare system. An online survey was created through Qualtrics with 25 questions. The link to the survey was distributed through text message and the social media website, Facebook. The results showed that the participants appear to believe that foster youth should stop receiving services at the age of 18 and emancipate out of care at the age of 21 while also suggesting that emerging adults, not in foster care, should be self-sufficient and moved out of their parents' home by the age of 23. These views could be due to the lack of awareness of the general population regarding the reality of the impact abuse, neglect, and life in the child welfare system can have on a developing child. Furthermore, the implication for the future of EFC is that foster youth may need continued assistance until the age of 23, perhaps in the form of housing vouchers as opposed to financial assistance.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to every child in the foster care system that inspire us through their stories of survival and perseverance. And to the social workers who go above and beyond to try to make the lives of these children just a little bit better every day.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the lack of information regarding the public's perception of the needs of foster youth emancipating from the system. It is extremely important for the professionals of social work to understand the general public's perspectives on extended foster care because of the great insight that can be gained. By gaining knowledge from the general public, the profession of social work can improve the services to the foster youth.

Problem Statement

Over the years, professionals have recognized the extra support youth in foster care need in order to succeed in the transition to adulthood. Research has shown that most former foster youth struggle to obtain employment, education, housing, avoid criminal activities, and establish strong relationships once they have emancipated from the system (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011). Since former foster youth struggle with the transition into adulthood and establishing independence, it became evident that they needed extra aid. After extensive research of the ongoing problem, California passed The California Fostering Connections to Success Act through Assembly Bill 12 (Department of Social Services, 2011). This act allowed foster care youth to remain in the system until the age of 21, as long as they satisfied all the requirements mandated by the policy.

Extending the foster care system also increases the costs to taxpayers as they are the ones who make this program possible. It was estimated that extended foster care will cost the government (and taxpayers) \$41,600 per youth for two years of services (Peters, Dworsky, Courtney, Pollack, 2009). This price tag is not including the extra year provided by revisions to AB12 allowing services to continue until the young adult's 21st birthday or any future changes that could extend their aid past their 21st birthday. Even though it is still unclear how many young adults are participating in the program and how much it is costing the state, the costs are significant. Like any other welfare program, the extended foster care program is likely to be facing budget constraints in the near future as financial stability has proven to be faulty in recent years. In 2003, child welfare programs experienced a 12.5% decrease in their General Revenue funding and were forced to decrease 3% (\$17 billion) on foster care payments, among other programs (Castro, 2003). Since child welfare agencies and programs are more likely to be facing budget reductions when the government is dealing with discrepancies among finances, professionals need to think about the program's future.

An important aspect when budget cuts are starting to occur in the government is the general population's opinion on the matter. Public opinion can have a tremendous impact on the program's future outcome and funding. The opinion of the general population can be an even bigger influence when taxpayer money is being utilized to fund these programs, such as in the case

of extended foster care. Because the extended foster care program is relatively new, there has not been much information about the perceptions the general population has of the program. If in the future the government faces another economic hardship, in which extended foster care's funding may be an area of interest to reduce, what will the public's response be? The only way to get an idea about their response is to understand and know their perspective about the extended foster care program.

The public's perspective on extended foster care can also provide information about their expectations of young adults transitioning into adulthood. In today's society, it is very common to see young adults in their twenties still living with their parents. In 2011, a study found that parents paid 50% of their young adults' expenses annually (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Carroll, 2011). There seems to be a huge gap of aid between emerging adults in foster care and youth who have never been in the system. The extended foster care program provides services to youth until their 21st birthday. In society today, the financial support and help for young adults outside of foster care seems to be needed for much longer. This study will explore the different expectations of independence people have for young adults in and out of foster care.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge and insight into the general public's perceptions of extended foster care. This study focuses on

what the public thinks about the qualifications, benefits and overall structure of the extended foster care program. The participants were able to share if they think the system should require more, less, or stay the same regarding education and employment. They also shared if they believe the benefits are appropriate for foster care youth. Participants were asked for their opinion on their expectations of when young adults should be completely independent. Questions include when it is appropriate to stop services to young adults and if that expectation matches the expectation we have for young adults who live at home. The literature has shown the clear need that former foster youth have for additional aid while they are transitioning into adulthood, but the general population can believe otherwise.

This is a quantitative study where participants were asked to complete an online survey with roughly 25 questions. Although this was the best format for the type of study chosen due to the large number of people that were surveyed, there were some drawbacks that were faced. The public tends to be difficult to survey because of the lack of interest they may have regarding the topic and the inconvenience they may experience in answering a lengthy survey. Also, due to time constraints, a smaller sample size will be obtained, risking an unrepresentative sample of the residents of Riverside County. Since it is the general population being surveyed, attempts were made to make the questionnaire short and easy to follow by choosing true/false questions and Likert-scale type questions out of respect for the participant's time. The goal

was to access a wide range of participants by using a convenience sampling approach were adults 18 years old and older were surveyed from Riverside County, both males and females and from various ethnicities. The goal was also to obtain the opinions of adults from every developmental age so as to not exclude any population.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Due to the fact that Extended Foster Care (EFC) is only going into its third year of existence, there is limited literature and information regarding all aspects of this program. This study contributes to the growing pool of information regarding this topic, specifically the general population's perspective towards child welfare and extended foster care.

As noted earlier, it is taxpayer money that is being spent on sustaining EFC, and it is critical to understand where the public stands on these types of programs. Extended foster care is somewhat of a fragile topic to push as the ones that are benefitting are no longer children, but adults. This factor makes EFC a difficult piece of legislation to lobby for. Therefore, the information gained from a study like this provides social work practitioners at the macro level an understanding how public perception may impact EFC policy in the future.

At the micro level, a study like this assists social work practitioners get a better idea as to what can be done to educate the public regarding foster youth and their role in assisting their transition into adulthood. Additionally, it is

an objective to get a better understanding if the public believes EFC should be extended even beyond the age of 21. As the literature states, emerging adulthood is developmental stage that continues into the mid-20s (Arnett, 2000). That being the case, when should extended foster care terminate? Should child welfare agencies be providing the same amount of support in completely raising these youth to become self-sufficient adults as they would receive being raised at home? The information gathered in this study can also contribute to the information regarding this topic.

The answers from the participants helps professionals understand the different expectations the public holds for former foster care youth and youth who have not been in the system. By obtaining this information, professionals can start addressing the reasons for the different expectations and strive to gain equality among the groups. The data obtained in this study helps social workers and advocates in future lobbying efforts for the program if and when the economy fluctuates. Not only can this study inform professionals about the public's expectations but it can also help social workers know what kind of knowledge the public has about foster care. By knowing their perspectives, social workers can educate the general population so that it becomes a community effort to help emerging adults in foster care who may not have support elsewhere. This study specifically strives to understand the general population's perspective about the extended foster care program.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A brief literature review of the guiding theories and principles of how extended foster care came into existence will be conducted in this chapter to give the reader a better understanding and a point of reference. There is a limited amount of research done in the particular area of the public's perspective on foster care. Therefore, research is needed to gather a better understanding of the public's attitudes towards their own emerging adult children versus the experiences of foster care emerging adults.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

In 2000, Arnett published an article in which he outlined a developmental theory that suggests there is a transitional period between adolescence and adulthood. He called this period emerging adulthood. His theory suggests that in industrialized countries, the age period of 18 to 25 is characterized by self-examination (Arnett, 2000, p.469). Arnett suggests that emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that is demographically distinct, where youth are experimenting with their identity and the idea of adulthood is subjective from person to person. According to Arnett, this is a time of exploration with risky behavior, financial instability, and frequent change in housing. More importantly, Arnett discovered that youth 18 to 25, value

personal qualities such as the ability to make decisions on their own, owning responsibility for themselves, and financial independence to consider themselves adults as opposed to what one might consider to be important such as demographical achievements like completing higher education or establishing a career (2000, p.472).

General Population Emerging Adults versus Foster Care Emerging Adults

Padilla-Walker, Nelson, and Carroll (2011) looked into the financial contributions parents make to their emerging adult children and the attitudes they had towards those contributions. These researchers also looked into how the parent's financial involvement influenced the children's attitudes about their autonomy. Padilla-Walker and collaborators took a sample of 402 students in college from four school sites in different geographical areas of the United States. Using a cluster analysis, they were able to determine that there were four types of financial supporting parents or rather parents who were financially supporting their adult children at different levels ranging from providing low levels of assistance to low to moderate and finally, high levels of financial assistance (Padilla-Walker et al., 2011). The researchers found that depending on the amount of financial assistance provided to these children, these emerging adults were developing at different rates into adulthood and it also had an impact on their lifestyle choices and well-being. Researchers found that the less financial support parents provided their children, the

quicker the children saw themselves as adults, worked more hours a week, engaged in fewer risky behaviors such as binge drinking, and were more established in the career path they will be taking (Padilla-Walker et al., pg. 56).

In 2011, a research team from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago set out to investigate how former foster youth had made the transition from adolescence into adulthood. In their longitudinal study, Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, and Vorhies (2011) looked at approximately 732 former foster youth from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin over a period of nine years. Referred to as the Midwest study, out of the 732 initially interviewed, this team was able to collect data from 596 individuals, an 83 percent response rate. This study looked at how these former foster youth had acclimated to young adulthood by evaluating vast areas of their lives, ranging from living arrangements to education, from income to physical health, and from personal relationships to parenthood (Courtney et al., 2011). They also evaluated their involvement with the criminal justice system as well as victimization and connectedness. The results indicate that former foster youth in comparison to youth of the same age that were not in foster care are not doing as well (Courtney et al., 2011). Former foster youth are struggling to graduate from high school and struggling even more to obtain any kind of post-secondary education (Courtney et al., 2011). Furthermore, Courtney and his colleagues found that they are having difficulty establishing financial stability as well as being more likely be involved with the criminal justice system. While it appears

that foster youth exiting the system at 18 years of age are struggling, these individuals were still attempting to beat the odds whichever way possible.

In 2007, Courtney, Dworsky, and Pollack reviewed the results of the Midwest study and what the implications were of these results. In their research and literature reviews, they found that in the general population, parents were contributing roughly \$38,000 per year to help support their adult children from the ages of 18-34 (as cited in Courtney et al., 2007). These adult children are also getting other means of support from their parents in the form of emotional and psychological support. Former foster youth on the other hand, do not have access to this type of support as evidenced by the results of the Midwest study. The authors argue that the legislation that is in place that is providing funding to foster youth should be amended to continue support until these youth are of greater age to give them an opportunity to get a stronger foothold of adulthood. Courtney and his colleagues go on to state that at the time this article was published, efforts were being made to extend the age of foster care. The question they put forth, however, was what role the juvenile courts would have who currently is responsible for overseeing foster youth care.

Eventually in 2008, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate, which was then signed into federal law by President George W. Bush (Courtney, Dworsky, & Napolitano, 2013). This bill can provide states

funding to extend foster care if the states chose to do so which California did in 2011 with the passing of Assembly Bill 12 (Courtney et al., 2013). Courtney and his collaborators (2013) interviewed several participants over the course of approximately a year that had a part in the passing of AB 12 and those who partook in its implementation. Furthermore, they also interviewed foster youth who would be directly affected by AB12 which helped these researchers report key findings of this process to help other states who have not extended foster care. What these researchers learned was that extensive planning needs to be done when trying to implement an extended foster care program, not only in what approach professionals will need in serving young adults verses minors, but also in the types of resources young adults will need during this time of transition (Courtney et al., 2013). As this bill is relatively new to the United States and to California, much research still needs to be done to assess how AB12 is currently working and what areas need improvement.

Missouri, however, was one of the first states to implement extended foster care. McCoy, McMillen, and Spitznagel (2008) conducted a study to assess certain questions in regards to who, what, where, and why. These researchers used both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess those that stay in extended foster care, for how long, and looked at why emerging adults left foster care. In their longitudinal study that took place between December of 2001 and May of 2003, these researchers used face to face interviews where open-ended questions were utilized. The quantitative

approach of this study was used when gathering data in regards to those who left the foster care system prior to 19, at what age did they exit the system, and where they went. The qualitative approach was utilized to discover the reasons as to why they left. McCoy and colleagues (2008) discovered four key findings: a good portion of extended foster youth's withdrawal from the system was not intended, frustration with the system was influential in youth's decision to leave foster care, youth who had family to live with left foster care early verses those individuals who did not, and finally, those individuals who acted out in resistance to their life circumstances left foster care early (p.7). Although this article gives researchers an idea as to what works and what does not work in the extended foster care system, the study is focused solely on youth in Missouri and may not be applicable in different states or even certain counties throughout the United States.

In 2013, Greeson attempted to explain the difficulties experienced by foster youth going through emerging adulthood to suggest an approach that could best help them go through this developmental transition. This research first looks at the Emerging Adulthood theory and the Life Course theory to set the theoretical foundation then goes into analyzing what has best helped foster youth succeed (Greeson, 2013). What Greeson has discovered after reviewing past and current literature is that these youth could be benefitting from having a positive and empowering individual mentoring them in their lives (2013). According to the article, these individuals do not have to be blood

related, just someone whom these foster youth respect and who exhibit certain positive attributes. In general, the author suggests that former foster youth benefit from making long-term connections with nurturing adults who will take the time to foster a relationship and provide the support and guidance young people need during this developmental stage in their lives (Greeson, 2013). Greeson (2013) concluded her article by putting forth implication for the future in regards to the possible direction for policies, practice, and research.

How the Public Views Foster Care

In 2012, Leber and LeCroy conducted a study that polled 301 participants nationwide about their views on the foster care system. They utilized a structured questionnaire composed of 55 true/false questions, Likert-scale questions, and comparison questions (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). What these researchers found was that the public had some understanding of general information about foster care such as why children are in foster care and how the foster care system is regulated (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). For example, the people polled were correct in identifying neglect as the predominant reason why children enter the foster care system (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). However, there were many more misunderstandings about more specific details about the system such as the number of children in foster care and people thinking a majority of children being placed with family members (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). The authors (2012) point out that the reality is that approximately 75% of foster children are placed in non-relative

placements such as group homes, institutions, or non-relative foster homes. Overall, the participants in this study did reflect positive opinions regarding the foster care system, believing that it was important and necessary to have it (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). The participants, however, deemed it less important than other systems in the nation such as the education and healthcare system (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). While this study sheds light on how the nation feels about the child welfare system, one must keep in mind this was written in the first year that EFC was being implemented.

Summary

While the importance of providing sufficient support both emotionally and financially to foster children has been widely documented, undoubtedly, the question of how long should this support be granted will arise. Foster care is expensive for the government to sustain and in recent times, it is clear that financial stability is far from a reality in today's economy. Workers in public services know all too well what types of services are the first to be evaluated when budget cuts are on the horizon. The fact that EFC population are no longer children in the eyes of the law, makes this policy a fragile one and one to undoubtedly be looked at when the money is simply not available. Inevitably, the public will have to weigh in on what services go and what services stay. It is of vital importance that the public has an accurate idea of extended foster care and its importance if supporters want it to have sustainability.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods that this study used to conduct its research. Part of this chapter explains the design of this study, sampling, procedures, data collection, instruments, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the general population's perspective on the extended foster care (EFC) program. The study explored the public's opinion through a quantitative online survey design. The quantitative survey design was used because there was a collection of information from the participants through their responses to the given questions (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014). An online survey design was chosen because of the minimal effort it will take the general public to participate in the survey. Since the general public may have a low interest in the subject and limited time to participate, an online survey was easily accessed and completed quickly. The participants were able to share their perspectives and opinions about EFC and emerging adulthood through 25 true or false questions and Likert scale questions. After receiving the participants'

responses they were transformed into numerical form and analyzed (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014).

One limitation of this study was the inability to access the online survey that some potential participants may have experienced. Another limitation was that some participants may have had personal bias against the child welfare system. Finally, since EFC is relatively new, some participants lacked the knowledge about the additional services that foster care offers to young adults older than 18 years of age.

Another limitation was that of the lack of information and tools developed regarding this particular subject. Therefore, the researchers had to create their own tool and during the course of the data collection, a participant contacted the researchers to suggest that one question was confusing.

Furthermore, by distributing the survey via text message and the social media website, Facebook, the researchers were only able to obtain a convenience sample and not a quota sample. The survey was also only offered in English prohibiting non-English speakers from participating.

Sampling

The general population's perspective about EFC was the focus of this study, therefore the participants were not in the social work profession. Social work professionals and advocates would more likely be informed and may have similar beliefs about child welfare systems, therefore would have a positive outlook on extended foster care. Although there was a small number

of participants who identified with being a county employee, it is unknown if they were social workers. This study sampled 117 participants that were able to access the online survey describing their perspectives and opinions about EFC.

The participants were solicited through convenience sampling. The questionnaire was administered to participants that were available and easy to find, also known as convenience sampling (Grinnell, Unrau, 2014). Since the questionnaire was administered via internet and text message, the researchers asked participants to identify other members of the population to forward the questionnaire, thus producing a snowball sample (Grinnell, Unrau, 2014).

In order to participate in this study, participants had to meet certain criteria. Participants were required to be 18 years old or older and could not be social work practitioners or working on their social work education.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data was obtained through an online survey, since the participants were able to respond to the questions directly and independently, without the help of the interviewer (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014). By having an online survey, researchers are decreasing the cost, increasing the speed of data obtainment and making it convenient for the participants to complete (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014). Due to the lack of instruments that are designed to acquire the perspectives and opinions of the general public on extended foster care, the

survey was created specifically for this research project by the researchers. The questions on the survey reflect the different requirements and benefits that the foster care system mandates for the enrolled youth. All the questions are relevant and designed to provide the most information.

The questionnaire contained questions about the participant's demographics; age, gender, ethnicity, county of residence and highest level of education. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire. All the variables in the demographics are nominal levels of measurement, except for age which is a scale level of measurement. Aside from the participants' demographics, the questionnaire also asked about their perspectives of EFC, expectations on emerging adults and their current knowledge on the foster care system.

The questionnaire had three sections which included knowledge about foster care, opinions about foster care and opinions towards helping young adult children. The section of knowledge about foster care contained five true or false questions. A question that was also included in this section will be "Few children who age out of foster care have trouble with the criminal justice system". The amount of correct answers that the participants are able to answer shows the degree of knowledge they have about foster care. Questions regarding opinions about foster care contain six Likert scale questions and two true or false questions. An example of one of the true or false questions is "The foster care system is great the way it is." The

participants' responses will be added and calculated into percentages to analyze the majority of responses. Opinions towards helping young adult children will have four Likert scale questions and one multiple choice question. One of the questions in this section will be, "When do you think foster youth should be emancipated out of the foster care?" The responses will be added and calculated into percentages in order to analyze the most frequent response.

One of the strengths of this instrument is that it was tailored to explore the specific areas of interest for this current study. All of the questions that are included are related to the topic of EFC. A second strength of the instrument is the number of questions. With only 25 questions, the questionnaire can be completed in a short amount of time. However, the length and type of questions chosen for this survey can also be a limitation. Due to this being an online quantitative survey as oppose to a face to face qualitative interview, the ability for the participants to expand on their answers or give their personal thoughts to the questions is not an option.

Procedures

The created instrument was available through Qualtrics, an online survey program that allowed all participants to access and complete the questionnaire anonymously. Participants received an email with a recruitment statement (Appendix B) asking for their participation and contribution to the field of social work. The email contained a hyperlink that took the participants

directly to the survey. Before starting the questionnaire, the participants were presented with informed consent, confidentiality, contact information and briefed on the voluntary nature of their participation (Appendix C). Once all the participants completed the questionnaire, the data collection took place.. The survey was 25 questions long and will take the participants about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Once the participants have finished their responses to the survey, a thank you message, contact information and purpose of the study will be displayed and their participation will be terminated (Appendix D).

Protection of Human Subjects

Before accessing the online survey, confidentiality was explained (Appendix B). Although their email may have been used for recruitment purposes, the researchers are not able to identify the responses of the participants. The instrument did not require any personal information that would jeopardize confidentiality and maintain anonymity of the participant. All data obtained was through software that will require a password known only to the researchers to ensure confidentiality. Once the research was completed, all data and information was destroyed.

Data Analysis

For this study, a quantitative procedure was used to access the general population's perspectives on the extended foster care system. Frequency analysis was used to review the demographic characteristics and other major

variables in the questionnaire. Crosstabs, nonparametric tests and correlation analysis was utilized in order to compare any differences in perspectives among age groups, gender, and political parties of the participants. The chi-square analysis was used as well to test if values of one particular variable from this study are associated with other variables.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study's design, sampling, procedures, data collection and data analysis. The instrument that was created for this study was also discussed and a brief overview of what the instrument will measure was also provided. Protection of human subjects was briefly discussed to ensure that all participants will be safe and their identity will be kept confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the general results of study. A total of 117 participants from various counties submitted their responses in a period of one month beginning February, 2015. First, the researchers will review the descriptive statistics of the study. Then, the researchers will summarize the data analyzed. Finally, the researchers will review the results of the study.

Demographics

In this study, there were a total of 117 participants. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of all the participants in this study. Out of 117 participants, 80.3% were females and 18.8% were males. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 73 years old. From the sample, 40.3% of the participants were in the age group of 18-30 years old, 28.6% were in the 31-40 age group, 26% were in the 41-59 age group and 5.2% were in the 60 or more age group. Most of the participants (42.7%) identified with the Democratic political party, while 16.2% identified with the Republican party. 11.1% identified with the Independent American Party and 6.8% reported to identify to other political party. 22.2% of the participants disclosed that they were not affiliated with any political party. When asked about ethnicity, 41.9% of the participants reported to be Caucasian, 41.9% were Hispanic, 1.7% were Asian

American and 13.7% identified with more than 1 ethnicity. When asked about their county of residence, 38.5% reported to be residing in Riverside County, 26.5% in San Bernardino County, 8.5% in Orange County, 6% in Los Angeles County, 1.7% in San Diego County and 18.8% of the participants reported to live in another county not mentioned above.

The participants were also asked about their personal life, in regards to having children. 52.1% of the participants reported to be parents, while 47.9% reported not to be parents. When asked if the participants had any experience with the foster care system, only 28.2% confirmed experiencing the foster care system. Out of the 33 participants that reported having experience in the foster care system, 13 had a family member in the foster care system, 10 participants were/are County employees, 4 participants were/are foster parents, 4 participants were in foster care as minors, and 2 participants reported to have experienced the system in more than 1 way.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	94	80.3
Male	22	18.8
Age		
18-30	47	40.3
31-40	34	28.6
41-59	30	26
60+	6	5.2

Political Party		
Democrat	50	42.7
Republican	19	16.2
Independent	13	11.1
Other	8	6.8
Not Affiliated	26	22.2

Ethnicity		
Caucasian	49	41.9
Hispanic	49	41.9
Asian	2	1.7
More than 1 Ethnicity	16	13.7

County of Residence		
Los Angeles	7	6
Orange	10	8.5
Riverside	45	38.5
San Bernardino	31	26.5
San Diego	2	1.7
Other	22	18.8

Parent?		
Yes	61	52.1
No	56	47.9

Experienced Foster Care		
Yes	33	28.2
No	84	71.8

Type of Experience		
Family Member	13	11.1
County Employee	10	8.5
Foster Parent	4	3.4
Dependent as Child	4	3.4
More than 1	2	1.7

Knowledge about Foster Care

Participants in this study were also asked about their knowledge of the foster care system and the probable outcomes for the children who emancipate. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics on the knowledge of foster care. Over 63.2% of participants don't believe that most foster care children enter the child welfare system because of physical abuse. On the other hand, 36.8% of participants believe this statement to be true. 59.8% of participants reported that they believe that most foster care children remain in the child welfare system until they age out because their families cannot care for them. Over 40.2% participants believed that most foster care children remain in the child welfare system for other reasons. The majority of participants (67.5%) believe that more than a few children who emancipate out of foster care become homeless, while only 32.5% of the participants believe that only a few children become homeless. 64.1% of the sample believe that most children who emancipate out of foster care return to their biological families and 35.9% of the sample reported to disagree with this statement. When questioned about children being involved with the criminal justice system when they age out of the foster care system, 67.5% of participants believe they get criminally involved, while only 32.5% disagreed.

Table 2. Knowledge about Foster Care

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Children enter Child Welfare system because of physical abuse	True- 43 False- 74	36.8 63.2
(Answer=False)		
Children remain the Child Welfare system because their families can't care for them	True- 70 False- 47	59.8 40.2
(Answer=True)		
Few children who age out of foster care become homeless	True- 38 False- 79	35.9 64.1
(Answer=False)		
Most children who age out of foster care return to their biological family	True- 38 False- 79	35.9 64.1
(Answer=True)		
Few foster children who age out of foster care have trouble with the criminal justice system	True- 38 False- 79	32.5 67.5
(Answer= False)		

Opinions towards Foster Care

The participants were also asked about their personal opinions about the foster care system and the services for young adults. Table 3 demonstrates the statistics on opinions towards foster care from the participants. Almost half of the participants (50.4%) disagree that the foster care system is great the way it is, 30.8% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed on the matter. The majority of the participants (88.9%) believed that having a county social worker visit a young adult once a month is not enough support. 39.3% of the participants reported to neither agreeing or disagreeing with requiring young adults to be employed for a minimum of 80 hours every month. On the other hand, 29.9% of the participants reported to disagree with this foster care requirement. The participants were asked if enrolling in some type of education was a good enough requirement for young adults in foster care, in which the majority of participants (69.2%) agreed. The majority of the participants (71.7%) reported that the foster care system should require a minimum amount of classes young adults should enroll in order to remain in the system. Almost all of the participants (96.6%) believed that young adults in foster care should have rules to follow in their home placements. The participants were also asked at what age do they believe that children stop receiving benefits and services from foster care, 45.3% of participants said the age of 18, 34.2% reported the age of 21, 12.8% reported the age of 23, 4.3% reported the age of 26 or older, and only 2.6% mentioned the age of 16.

48.7% of the participants believe that foster children should age out of the foster care system at the age of 21. 21.4% of the participants believe children should age out at age 18, 20.5% reported the age of 23, 7.7% reported the age of 26 or older and only .9% reported the age of 16.

Table 3. Opinions towards Foster Care

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
The foster care is great the way it is.	Strongly Agree- 0	0
	Agree- 6	5.1
	Disagree- 59	50.4
	Strongly Disagree- 15	12.8
	Not Sure- 36	30.8
A county social worker visiting a young adult once a month is enough support.	Strongly Agree- 0	0
	Agree- 6	5.1
	Disagree- 70	59.8
	Strongly Disagree- 34	29.1
	Not Sure- 6	5.1
A minimum of 80 hours a month of employment is a good enough requirement for young adults in foster care.	Strongly Agree- 4	3.4
	Agree- 32	27.4
	Disagree- 46	24.8
	Strongly Disagree- 6	5.1
	Not Sure- 46	39.3
Enrolling in college, community college, or a vocational education program is a good enough requirement for young adults in foster care.	Strongly Agree- 15	12.8
	Agree- 66	56.4
	Disagree- 14	12
	Strongly Disagree- 1	.9
	Not Sure- 19	16.2
Should there be a minimum amount of classes young adults in foster care should be	Strongly Agree- 20	17.1
	Agree- 64	54.7
	Disagree- 9	7.7
	Strongly Disagree- 1	.9

enrolled in?	Not Sure- 21	17.9
Should young adults in foster care have rules when they are living in placement?	Strongly Agree- 0 Agree- 113 Disagree- 3 Strongly Disagree- 0 Not Sure- 0	0 96.6 2.6 0 0
Children in foster care are able to receive benefits and services until the age of:	16 - 3 18 - 53 21 - 40 23 - 15 26+ - 5	2.6 45.3 34.2 12.8 4.3
When do you think foster children/young adults should age out of foster care?	16 - 1 18 - 25 21 - 57 23 - 24 26+ - 9	0.9 21.4 48.7 20.5 7.7

Opinions towards Helping Young Adults

The participants on this sample were also asked about their opinion on young adult children who are not in the foster care system. Table 4 shows the data from the participants' opinions on helping young adults. The participants were asked at what age they believe parents should stop financially helping their young adult children, 39.3% of the participants reported the age of 21, 31.6% reported the age of 23, 20.5% reported the age of 26 or older and only 6.8% of the participants reported the age of 18. When asked how old they believed that most young adult children move out of their parents' home, 41% reported the age of 23, 21.4% reported the age of 26 or older, 18.8% reported

the age of 18, and only 16.2% of the participants reported the age of 21. The participants were asked of their age when they became a self-sufficient adult, in which 28.2% of the participants reported the age of 26 or older, 23.1% reported the age of 18, 22.2% reported the age of 23 and 21.4% reported the age of 21. 47.9% of the participants reported to be between the ages of 16-20 when they moved out of their parents' home, 22.2% were between the ages of 21-25, 17.9% are currently living at home and only 10.3% of the participants reported the ages 26-30. Out of the 21 participants (17.9%) that are still living at home, 8 participants (6.8%) are pursuing higher education, 5 participants (4.3%) is due to lack of affordable housing, 3 participants (2.6%) reported it was their cultural expectation, 3 participants (2.6%) reported that it was their familial obligations and only 1 participant (.9%) reported it was to being involved with the criminal justice system.

Table 4. Opinions towards Helping Young Adult Children

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
At what age should parents stop helping their young adult children financially?	16 - 0	0
	18 - 8	6.8
	21 - 46	39.3
	23 - 37	31.6
	26+ - 24	20.5
How old do you think most young adults move out of their parents' home?	16 - 1	.9
	18 - 22	18.8
	21 - 19	16.2
	23 - 48	41
	26+ - 25	21.4

At what age did you consider yourself a self-sufficient adult?	16 - 4	3.4
	18 - 27	23.1
	21 - 25	21.4
	23 - 26	22.2
	26+ - 33	28.2
How old were you when you moved out of your parents' home?	16-20 - 56	47.9
	21-25 - 26	22.2
	26-30 - 12	10.3
	Still live at home – 21	17.9

Still live at home due to:

Lack of Employment	1	.9
Criminal Involvement	1	.9
Family Obligations	4	3.4
Cultural Expectations	3	2.6
Lack of affordable Housing	7	6
Pursuing higher education	13	11.1
Other	6	5.1

Presentation of the Findings

A chi-square, non-parametric and a correlations analysis were performed on the data. The following are significant findings from the data collection.

A chi-square test was performed to examine the relationships between political party and the participants' participation with the foster care system. The test showed that the relation between the variables was significant, $X^2(4) = 12.86$, $p = .012$. This shows that participants identifying as Republicans were less likely to have experienced the foster care system. Another chi-square test was performed to examine the relationships between political party and their

knowledge about emancipated children becoming homeless. The results showed a significant relation between the variables, $X^2 (4) = 12.66, p = .013$. Participants who identify with the Republican Party believed that only a few children who emancipate from the foster care system become homeless. A chi-square test was also performed to examine the relationship between political party and the participants' thoughts on having a social worker visit the young adult only once a month. The results showed a significant relation, $X^2 (12) = 24.41, p = .016$, showing that participants who were not affiliated with any political party were most likely to agree with the statement. No other differences were found by political party.

Non-parametric tests were also performed to examine the data. A Mann-Whitney test showed that the median for females was lower than males on believing that 80 hours a month of employment is a good enough requirement ($p = .046$). The test also showed that females reported significantly lower median than males on the age of when young adults should emancipate ($p = .046$).

A correlations test was also performed to examine the relationships of the data collected. Age had a positive relationship with believing that children enter the child welfare system because of physical abuse, $t (115) = -2.12, p = .036$. The younger the participants, the more likely they agreed with the statement. Age also had a positive relationship with believing that 80 hours of employment is a good requirement for young adults in the foster care system, t

(115) = .217, $p=.002$. The younger the participants, the more likely for them to believe that 80 hours of employment is appropriate. Another positive relationship was age with believe that enrolling in college is a good enough requirement for young adults, $t(115) = .239$, $p=.001$. The younger participants were more likely than the older participants to agree with this requirement. A positive relationship was shown by the variable age with the age of the participants when they moved out, $t(116) = -.253$, $p= .0004$. The older the participants, the younger they were when they moved out.

Conclusion

The preceding chapter discussed the results of the study. There are no other significant findings from this data. The findings and data have shown the general populations' perspective on extended foster care, knowledge about foster care and their expectations for young adults.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings discovered through the survey and its implication to the social work profession. Furthermore, the authors discuss any limitations in this study and suggestions for any future studies regarding the topic of emerging adulthood and extended foster care as well as the impact this information could have on social work practice and policy.

Discussion

The literature shows that emerging adults that were aging out of the foster care system at the age of 18 were not being successfully launched into adulthood and the results were a dismal future of homelessness, criminal lawlessness, early pregnancy, and drug use or abuse. As of 2012, aid has been extended to this population until the age of 21 which according the data collected in this survey, only 34.2% of the participants agreed that this was the appropriate age for youth to emancipate. A greater portion responded that 18 should be the age when foster children should stop receiving services and emancipate at the age of 21. Furthermore, according to the data collected in this survey, individuals who were younger by merely 5 years of age answered incorrectly about the reason why most children enter into the child welfare system in the first place: neglect. These opinions could be a result of the lack

of knowledge regarding the foster care experience and the reality of the lives of survivors of abuse, neglect and the child welfare system.

The literature further suggests that youth who were given less financial support as they grew up had a positive impact on the youth's lifestyle choices and the quicker children saw themselves as independent adults. Allowing emerging adults to be more financially independent also made for youth who worked more hours, participated less in risky behaviors and had a greater sense as to what career path they wanted to pursue (Padilla-Walker et al., 2011, pg. 56). So why are foster youth having so much trouble if they in fact are being provided less financial support at a younger age than youth in the general population? One would assume that they would develop into an adult quicker and better than an emerging adult who was never in foster care. The reality is that most parents continue to provide support to their children between the ages of 18-34 as Courtney and colleagues (2007) discovered in their review of their Midwest study, further supported by the participants in this study who felt that support for their biological children should extend until 23. The support provided by parents to their young adult children comes in a variety of facets whether it is financial, emotional, or psychological. Greeson (2013) discovered that the presence of life-long connections that are encouraging and empowering can make a difference in the development of foster youth which is also reflected in the response that the participants in this survey had with regards to believing that a monthly visit from a social worker

was enough support for foster youth with a majority (88.9%) of the sample disagreeing with that statement.

And although there was a significant finding with regards to how participants who identified as Republicans answered questions that gauged the participants familiarity with child welfare and EFC, Republicans only made up 16.2% (19 participants) of the sample size. Another key finding was that political party did not appear to influence the majority of perspectives on political party. To be able to thoroughly explore this notion further, a more representative sample size or quota sample would need to be obtained to gain a deeper understanding regarding this topic. Overall, perspectives on Extended Foster Care did not differ based on the demographics of the participant, which was not expected.

Limitations

Due the limited research regarding this topic, the authors had to develop their own survey tool. It was the hope and goal of the researchers that the wording of this tool was clear, concise, and understandable by the general population by and large. However, during the course of data collection, a participant contacted the researchers to report that one question was confusing. Furthermore, as the social media website Facebook was utilized in the distribution of the survey, the researchers had limited control over whether or not the survey link could be “shared” via Facebook “friends” and thus surveyed people residing outside of the Counties listed in the survey. Had the

researchers formatted that question to allow the participants to input their County of residence, the researchers could have gotten a better idea of the population being surveyed and could have potentially had a broader sample to increase generalizability for this study.

As the sample used for this particular study was a convenience sample or an availability sample, there are inherent limitations when utilizing this type of sampling method. Due to the fact that there was no methodical procedure involved when selecting participants, this sample is not exactly representative of the entire general population (Grinnell & Unrau, 2014, p. 307). This approach also limited the ability to obtain a true quota sample as there were more female participants than male, as well as having a greater number of participants in the 18-30 age range than the other age groups. There were also more Democrats than any other political party who participated.

Another limitation identified was that of accessibility. As this was mostly distributed via social media and text message, those individuals who may not have access to internet or are not members of social media or do not have a cellular phone, would not be able to participate. Furthermore, this survey was only available in English. Therefore, non-English speakers would also not be able to participate in this survey.

However, there were strengths regarding this project and the information obtained through it. For instance, the size of the sample was relatively a good size considering the limited time and resources available to

the researchers as well as the diversity of opinions that came through the data. Furthermore, there appeared to be variety among the demographics that insinuated diversity among the participants.

Suggestions for future research regarding this topic could include a qualitative approach to allow the participants the ability to fully expand on their beliefs and opinions about emerging adulthood and EFC. To be able to provide the proper support and resources to youth transitioning into adulthood while in foster care, it would be helpful to know what kind of support the general population provides for their children in the same age group.

Furthermore, the question which asked the participants if non-minor dependents should have rules to abide by while in their placements, the majority of the sample (96.6%) stated that they believed non-minor dependents should have rules to abide by while in their placement homes or while participating in extended foster care. Therefore, it would be interesting to see a qualitative study ask what kind of rules should be given and what consequences should be applied should the non-minor dependent fail to comply.

Another question in this survey asked the participants if a monthly visit from a social worker is enough support for non-minor dependents, and 88.9% stated that this was not enough support. It would also be interesting to see what the general population and non-minor dependent's views would be in

regards to the amount of contact or time a social worker should spend with a non-minor dependent.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

The results from this study implicate that the general population believes the welfare system as it currently stands needs to be changed. In what way the system needs to be changed is a question for future researchers. However, it appears that the participants in this study believe that one change that could be implemented is that of rules for non-minor dependents in their placements. The types of rules to be implemented are also debatable and is worthy of further investigation. Although this could be difficult to implement with non-minor dependents that live in apartments, it is a subject worth exploring with those who have rented to non-minor dependents or placements who take in this population.

Furthermore, this study indicates that the general population feels as though non-minor dependents should stop receiving services at a much younger age, but yet are willing to provide additional support to their emerging adult children up to 23 years of age. 41% of participants stated that children should move out of their parents' home by the age of 23. This could also be an area to explore for those social work practitioners who believe that the age to qualify for extended foster care be raised to 23. Instead of providing full financial support as this could be a source of contention for some people, future policy could be introduced to provide housing vouchers for non-minor

dependents until the age of 23 while possibly reducing the direct financial support. Thus encouraging financial independence while ensuring these individuals do not end up homeless. Giving non-minor dependents housing vouchers until the age of 23 could also give non-minor dependents the ability to build their credit record to ensure that they will be able to obtain housing once emancipated as well as providing additional support while they learn how to properly manage money.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore the general population's perspectives regarding extended foster care. Significant findings of this study were that political party affiliation had an impact on experience with the child welfare system and the results of life after foster care of emancipated youth. Gender also was significant in certain questions such as the requirement of the amount of employment hours. It was also found that age also was significant in believe that 80 hours of employment was a good enough requirement for youth in foster care as well as enrolling in college. Furthermore, it was discovered that the older a person was, the younger they were when they moved out of their parents' home. The researchers suggest that further studies be conducted to explore what EFC requirements are effective and what may need to be changed to be able to provide the best services for emancipating youth to ensure a successful launch into adulthood.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Knowledge about Foster Care:

1. Most foster care children enter the child welfare system because they have been physically abused.
True False
2. Most foster care children remain in the child welfare system until they age out because their families could not care for them.
True False
3. Few children who age out of foster care become homeless.
True False
4. Most children who age out of foster care return to the biological family they were removed from in the first place.
True False
5. Few foster children who age out of care have trouble with the criminal justice system.
True False

Opinions towards Foster Care:

1. The foster care system is great the way it is.
Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
2. A county social worker visiting a young adult once a month is enough support.
Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
3. A minimum of 80 hours a month of employment is a good enough requirement for young adults in foster care.
Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
4. Enrolling in college, community college or a vocational education program is a good enough requirement for young adults in foster care.
Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure

5. Should there be a minimum amount of classes foster care young adults should be enrolled in?

Yes	No
-----	----

6. Should young adults in foster care have rules they should follow when they are living in placements?

Yes	No
-----	----

7. Children in foster care are able to receive benefits and services until the age of:

16	18	21	23	25	26+
----	----	----	----	----	-----

8. When do you think foster children/young adults should age out of foster care?

16	18	21	23	25	25+
----	----	----	----	----	-----

Opinions towards helping young adult children:

1. At what age do you think parents should stop helping their young adult children financially?

16	18	21	23	25	26+
----	----	----	----	----	-----

2. How old do you think most young adult children move out of their parent's home?

16	18	21	23	25	26+
----	----	----	----	----	-----

3. At what age did you consider yourself a self-sufficient adult?

16	18	21	23	25	26+
----	----	----	----	----	-----

4. How old were you when you moved out of your parents' home?

16-20	21-25	26-30	Still live at home
-------	-------	-------	--------------------

5. If your answer to question 12 was "Still live at home," please select the reason why below.

Lack of employment
Involvement with criminal justice system
Familial obligations
Cultural expectations
Lack of affordable housing
Pursuing higher education
Other

Demographics

1. Age

2. Gender

Female

Male

3. Political Party

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other

Not affiliated

4. Are you a parent?

Yes

No

5. Have you had any experience with the foster care system?

Yes

No

If you selected "YES" for the previous question, please check all that apply:

I am/was in the foster care system as a minor.

I have/had a family member in the foster care system.

I am/was a foster parent.

I am/was a county employee.

6. Please check all that apply:

Caucasian

Hispanic

African American

Asian American

Native American

Pacific Islander

7. County of Residence:
Los Angeles
Orange
Riverside
San Bernardino
San Diego

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT

Recruitment

You have been invited to participate in an online survey. Your participation will be extremely helpful to the California State University, San Bernardino Masters of Social Work students and to the field of Social Work. If you would like to access the online survey please click on the link below. When you are done, if you could further assist in our project by forwarding this email to 5 people, we would greatly appreciate your corporation.

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

Extended Foster Care: The General Population's Perspective

Introduction: This study is designed to collect the general population's thoughts and opinions about the extended foster care program and emerging adulthood. This study is being conducted by Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), Laura Andrade, MSW Student, and Daniela Salinas, MSW student. This research study has been approved by the School of Social Work's Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board.

Procedures: The researchers have created a survey with 20 questions related to extended foster care. The questions will be true or false, multiple choice and rating scale. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey was created and will be used on Qualtrics, an online database for surveys.

Risks/Discomforts: There are few to no risks for being involved in this study. Although there may be no risks noticed by the researchers, participants can feel otherwise. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or uneasy please feel free to stop and exit the survey.

Benefits: Through your participation, the researchers and other professionals will gain knowledge about this certain topic. The extended foster care program is a relatively new program to the state of California and has limited evaluation. By your responses, you will be helping many professionals and clients that work around and in the extended foster care program.

Confidentiality: All the answers that will be obtained from the participants will be kept confidential at all times. Qualtrics (survey database) is a secure database that needs a special username and password to access the data collection that only the primary researchers have access to. Your personal information will be never be asked throughout this questionnaire. Once the research study has been completed, all data collected will be deleted by the primary researchers.

Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time throughout the survey, you may stop and exit the survey without any type of repercussions. You may exit the survey by simply closing the internet window. The researchers will not be able to identify who quit the survey.

Questions: If you have questions about this research study, please contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister (909) 537-5559 or cmcallis@csusb.edu.

Results: The results of this study will be available in the CSUSB Library after September 2015

Please check the box if you agree to participate:

Please check the box if you are at least 18 years old:

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this study. This study is designed to collect the general population's thoughts and opinions about the extended foster care program and emerging adulthood. This study is being conducted by Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), Laura Andrade, MSW Student, and Daniela Salinas, MSW student. This research study has been approved by the School of Social Work's Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board. If you would like to review the results of this study, it will be available in the CSUSB Library after September 2015. If you have questions about this research study, please contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister at (909) 537-5559 or cmcallis@csusb.edu.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a two person project where authors collaborated throughout. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas

2. Data Entry and Analysis

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings

- a. Introduction and Literature

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas

- b. Methods

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas

- c. Results

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas

- d. Discussion

Joint effort: Laura Andrade and Daniela Salinas