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WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO FOSTER YOUTH ENROLLING IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of former and current foster youth, who either graduated from a post-secondary institution, enrolled in college or a vocational training, in order to identify the factors that contributed to their post-secondary education enrollment.

Sixteen participants provided information about their personal experience with post-secondary education enrollment via personal interview and self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to compare responses on the self-administered questionnaire. Constant comparative analysis method was used to analyze interview data and code it into themes or codes.

This study's findings show that the majority of the participants enrolled in college because they were mainly motivated by individual factors, secondly relationship factors and thirdly systemic factors. Specifically, college gave them hope for the future and it was a personal goal. Some also reported the influence, motivation, and support of peers, caregivers, mentors, certain high school and college programs, like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)) and EOPS (Extended Opportunity Program Services). Of utmost need to them is a hands-on-support which includes assistance with college application completion, college class registration, preparation for placement tests and college tours which they noted they did not get enough of. This study's findings are vital for preparing foster youth for post-secondary

education as the study provides needed insights on the necessary services,

policy and programs.

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We would like to recognize and offer our gratitude to the following people, who have contributed to our educational growth and research knowledge.

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<div align="right">Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez</div>

DEDICATION

To my God, my Creator and Personal Savior, who reduced an insurmountable mountain to a surmountable mole hill, so that I can triumph: I give you my utmost gratitude.

To my loving, caring and patient husband, Chidi,
Thank you so much for being a reasonable human being, and for being you.
I cannot ask for a more supportive and empathic husband.
Thank you so much for being the wind beneath my wings.

To my late parents, Nze Dennis and Princess Catherine Ani (Nneoma),
I am who I am because of you. Thank you so much for embedding the values of education in me, among other things. This is for you!

To my wonderful siblings,
Thank you for being my inspiration and for setting great examples for my emulation.
I can unequivocally say that mom and dad are very proud of us all!

To everyone in my support team,
I am infinitely grateful for all your contributions to the success of my academic endeavors. Tracy Burks, thank you for allowing me to pick your brain! You have all made this journey worthwhile.

To my friend, Catherine Redmond,
Just when I thought my plate was too full to take on a new challenge, you motivated and empowered me to embark on this academic journey. Although

we ended at different schools, we made it together with flying colors. Thank

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CHUKWU KA DIBIA, Indeed!!

Stella Anisalone

To my Wonderful Family and Friends…I never was without your support!

A mi Mamá, Papá y familia, gracias por un principio de oportunidad.

To my Beloved friends *Bill and Marie Galloway*, God knows what lies ahead.

To my Lovely daughter *Brianna Perez*, daddy missed you too!

To my Son in the Lord *Timothy Perez*, you're growing up a fine young man.

To my Beautiful daughter *KiJana Esther Perez*, you are nothing but a joy to me.

To my Gracious daughter *Ebony Tabitha Perez*, you have your mother's faith…and act like her too, keep it up!

To my Sweet Pea *Tonionna Rachel Stanton*, I have been blessed to have you in my life.

To my Fabulous son-in-law *Brent Stanton*, you really do have a good spirit.

To my Dear and Blessed wife *Teonna*…what would my life have been… had I not met you…I never have to wonder. I Love you!

To the beginning of days and author of all things good. You are the splendor of all things magnificent in my life. Your light has found me and been my guide through all my troublesome times…my gratitude will never be enough.

– Manuel Joseph Perez

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the outcomes that have been associated with former foster youth as they have left the foster care system and pursued self-sufficiency. The outcomes for former foster youth continue to be negative despite efforts to help improve them. This chapter includes the general purpose of the study, to identify the factors that contribute to successful educational outcomes associated with foster youth and the significance that this study has to social work as a practice in the field of Child Welfare.

Problem Statement

The one significant issue related to older foster youth (18 and above) is that they are consistently behind in enrolling in or attaining post-secondary education (beyond high school) compared with their counterparts who are not members of the foster care system. The American foster care system has moved away from the days when children that were removed or abandoned by their guardians were raised up in orphanages. Modern family values viewed orphanages as a form of institutionalization and have since replaced them with a foster care system made up of families willing to provide shelter and support to both girls and boys. By placing foster children in a family home, the idealistic family values of care and nurture were provided despite a child's loss of sibling and or parental support. Despite the altruistic pursuit for stability and

security through foster care, many youth in foster care experience some of the worst statistical outcomes faced by youth in the nation. Some statistics for former foster youth shows that they fare bleak outcomes as compared to any other adolescent group in the nation (Eilertson, 2002).

One prominent study of foster youth outcomes was conducted in Wisconsin in 1998, where 157 youth were tracked for a period of 12 to 18 months after aging out of the foster care system (Eilertson, 2002). This study provided one of the clearest portraits of what former foster youth have been experiencing nationwide when they are forced to make it on their own. The study showed that:

- only 37 % had completed high school,

- only 39 % had obtained employment,

- a total of 32 % were on public assistance, and

- a total 18 % were jailed after leaving foster care (Eilertson, 2002).

Due to foster care and support historically ending for foster youth at 18 or upon high school graduation, they have been required to care for themselves unrealistically early. Because a majority of foster youth have little or no family support due to separation from birth parents and length of time spent in foster care, they often lack the familial and social support that is mostly available to their counterparts who did not grow up in the foster care system. For example, of the general population of young people between the

ages of 18 and 24, half are living at home and of the general population of young adults in their twenties, two thirds are receiving economic support from their parents (Atkinson, 2008). Furthermore, a study in California found that, of the number of former foster youth that had aged out of the foster care system, 65% did so with no secure housing in place at all (California, 2002). An even more prominent study, the Midwest Study, found that aged out foster youth were up to two times more likely not to have the means to pay for their rent than their peers (Chapin Hall, n.d.). Still another study, The Casey Family Program's Study, found that within one year of leaving foster care, one out of five former foster youth will have experience a minimum of one day of homelessness (Casey, 2005).

Additionally, foster youth are more likely than their peers to become teenage parents and receive government assistance due to poverty (Daining & DePanfilis,2007). Moreover, because most emancipated foster youth are not educated past high school, they are more likely to become involved in illegal activities such as drugs, theft and or other crimes resulting in prison time (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Incarceration for foster youth can have compounding effects. The possibility being that while incarcerated, foster youth's children can be removed and placed in foster care, thereby repeating the foster care cycle once more (Osgood, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

This study purposefully focuses on the positive factors that have helped or will help foster youth enroll in post-secondary education. Research has found that education is important in preventing the issues foster youth are facing. For example, Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea (2006) found that education alone is the most effective means of reducing poverty, unemployment, deterring crime and lowering incarceration rates. Understanding which factors contribute towards foster youth enrolling in post-secondary education will enable social service agencies to hone in resources to assist this vulnerable population obtain an education past high school. Without a post-secondary education, it will be difficult for emancipated foster youth to gain meaningful employment and live above the poverty level. Education has been the gateway through which one can gain meaningful employment in order to support his or her family (Dinisman and Zeira, 2011).

More specifically, this study is concerned with finding out whether the factors that influence foster youths' enrollment in post-secondary education are systemic based, relationship based or resiliency based.

Systemic based factors are factors that can be attributed to being a part of a system, irrespective of the entity that is providing the services. For example, programs, agencies and or professional services provided by individuals and or organizations represent systemic factors. This study seeks

to find out if systemic based factors influenced foster youths' decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

Relationship based factors are factors that are relational and that have influenced the foster youth to enroll in post-secondary education. For instance, family and friends can be a significant influence on a foster youths' decision to enroll in post-secondary education program. The relationship does not need to be current since memories of past relationships can be a significant influence and defining factor for foster youth enrolling in post-secondary education. This study seeks to find out if relationship based factors influenced foster youths' decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

Resiliency based factors are defined as those factors that can be attributed to individual traits. These factors can be a part of an individual's make up so as to contribute to his/her ability to overcome life's barriers. For example, motivation to succeed educationally is a resiliency. Also, a person's faith, hope for the future, personal habits, self-esteem and overall perspective in life can have a significant influence on whether or not a foster youth enrolls in post-secondary education. This study seeks to find out if resiliency based factors influenced foster youths' decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

As an exploratory study, this research seeks to understand which factors: systemic, relationship and or resiliency based, correlate with foster youth enrolling in college. This study does not postulate that one factor is

superior to the other. Rather, it seeks to understand which ones correlate with foster youth enrolling in post-secondary education.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Based on the noted effects of this problem, many people are impacted when former foster youth's lack of post-secondary education leads to poverty, high crime rates, incarceration, second generation foster children, family instability, lack of sustainable income and even homelessness. Obviously, the emancipated youth and current foster youth will be impacted if this issue is not resolved.

Also, professionals who are involved in providing services to the foster youth, which include social workers, educators, educational liaisons, peer and family assistants, mental health practitioners and public health nurses, are impacted by this issue because of the continuous problems they encounter with this population and the multiple needs they face as a result of it. In addition, institutions that provide services to the foster youth and children will be impacted. These include the following: Children and Family Services (CFS), the educational system, health care system, correctional institutions, and housing authority. Moreover, governmental agencies and non-profit organizations that provide funding sources for the development of interventions for foster care youth will be impacted. Policy makers will also be impacted by this issue.

With the results obtained from this research study, social workers and other professionals who work with foster youth will gain insights on what factors propel foster youth to enroll in post-secondary education. Being armed with this important information, social workers and other professionals will know how to best understand the barriers these youths' face so that they can fully engage them and help them to obtain help that will be of real benefit to them. Moreover, through the results obtained from this study, social workers will be able to discern and apply programs that target the actual needs of these youth so that they can be best prepared to enroll in post-secondary education. Furthermore, with the information gathered from this study, social workers will be able to work better with these youth and also educate program developers and policy makers on factors that can positively impact foster youth in terms of post-secondary education enrollment/attainment.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will discuss some of the studies concerning foster youth

and their efforts, or lack thereof, to attain a post-secondary education. Several

sections will be explored in this chapter including some legislative laws and

programs that have been created in order to improve foster youth's post-

secondary education outcomes. Moreover, barriers to education are

discussed, as well as positive factors that are associated with foster youth

enrolling in post-secondary education. Finally, this chapter will discuss some

theoretical frameworks that guide conceptualization of the problems

encountered by foster youth.

Legislative Review

Despite the importance of a post-secondary education, very little is

known about former foster youth that enroll in college because very often the

data is not collected by schools (Davis, 2006). The absence of data makes it

even more difficult for service professionals, advocates, analyst and

policymakers to effectively assist foster youth attend college (Davis, 2006).

Despite some federally mandated policies to assist youth in foster care

attend college (such as the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 which

provides appropriate support services for living, career and post-secondary

education preparation and the Chafee Education and Training Vouchers Program which allocates $45 million annually to states to help foster youth with educational expenses), these programs lack support structures to help foster youth transition into college (Davis, 2006).

Recent statewide initiatives have helped foster youth receive aid and support by providing transitional programs and fee waivers (mainly at state funded colleges), notably in California, Indiana and Washington (Davis, 2006). Despite these efforts, foster youth are still lacking in post-secondary education enrollment, falling well below their non-foster care peers.

U.S. policy aimed at extending foster care to the age of 21 and aimed at addressing outcomes of foster care youth transitioning into adulthood began with the 1985 Independent Living Program Initiative (ILP) which helped prepare youth for independent living (Courtney, 2008). The ILP program was reauthorized in 1993 and in 1999 by the Foster Care Independence Act which allowed more funding and flexibility in the operation of ILPs to states and counties (Courtney, 2008). The 1999 Foster Care Independence Act allowed for 30% of the funding to be used for foster care room and board (Courtney, 2008). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Fostering Connections Act) signed into law in 2008, allowed states to extend foster care, beginning in 2011, past 18 (Courtney, 2008). In California, Assembly Bill 12 was signed into law on September 30, 2010 , which went into effect on January 1, 2012 to implement the Fostering Connections Act of 2008

for the sole purpose of improving foster care outcomes (State, 2014).

California youth are currently eligible to foster care past age 18 and up to age

21, provided that the youth meet certain eligibility requirements of either being

engaged in work and or education (State, 2014). As the largest population and

representation of foster care kids reside in California, Chapin Hall at the

University of Chicago has taken interest in interviewing youth age 16-17 and

following them until age 21 to see how they will fare under the new policy

(Courtney, Charles, & Okpych, n.d.).

Furthermore, in California, foster youth programs like the Independent

Living Program (ILP) and Transitional Conference are designed to improve the

chances of foster youth reaching self-sufficiency by teaching them

independent living skills like money management, financial aid and scholarship

application completion. Transitional conferencing with youth start at the age of

16 and are designed to helps foster youth plan for their academic, housing,

and employment success. In addition, there are services to assist foster youth

from PFA (Peer and Family Assistants) and EL (Educational Liaisons) which

include but are not limited to tracking down credits from former schools,

supporting foster youths with tutors, educating foster youth on the importance

of obtaining a high school diploma and the benefits of obtaining a post-

secondary education are also provided to them. Despite these programs and

services, foster youth continue to trail their counterparts in the areas of

academic achievement, obtaining stable housing and employment (Osgood et

al., 2010). This is why this study asks the question, what are the beneficial factors that contribute to foster care youth enrolling in post-secondary education?

Barriers to School Enrollment

Several reasons have been given by researchers as to why foster youth fall behind in post-secondary education attainment. Some of these reasons include lack of parental or legal guardian guidance (which most of foster youths counterparts are able to receive), problems with independent living skills (such as shopping for groceries and money management), challenges with mental and physical health issues, multiple changes in elementary and secondary schools due to multiple placements, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty and other troublesome issues which can hinder their ability to gain admission into higher education (Davis, 2006;Geenen & Powers, 2007; Osgood et al. 2010).

In addition to these reasons, Daining and DePanfilis (2007) also added the experience of trauma and maltreatment. Daining and DePanfilis (2007) also report that a majority of these young adults (70%) have the aspiration to obtain post-secondary education; however, only 10% of college-aged foster youth enroll in some type of post-secondary education. A total of 100,000 college-aged foster youth do not take the advantage of obtaining post-secondary education. Osgood and colleagues (2010) found that only 54 percent of youth that emancipated from foster care at age eighteen, completed

high school within two and a half years to four years, as compared to 78 percent of same-age peers in the general population.

Other research has identified barriers to higher educational outcomes as being systemic. Specifically, foster youth are not being adequately prepared for college in high school, attend low achieving schools, have high rates of school transfers, lack coordination of school records, and have poor communication between caseworkers, schools and foster care parents, all of which lead to poor educational outcomes (Naccarato, Brophy, & Courtney, 2010). These problems have been associated with low academic achievement, contribute to high dropout rates and a reduced likelihood of foster youth enrolling in college (Naccarato et al., 2010). Other barriers are associated with a lack of preparation and promotion of a post-secondary education by the child welfare system while others include a lack of support programs available in college that can provide assistance to former foster youth (Dworsky & Pérez, 2010). Still, another issue is that of advocacy between foster youth and the programs available to help them enroll and succeed in college as many do not even know they exist (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010).

<div align="center">

Positive Factors Associated with Post-Secondary
School Enrollment

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Dinisman and Zeira (2011) reported that education is the key to success later in life and as a result, greater effort should be directed towards

educational prospects for adolescents in care. Current research data for foster youth graduating with a post-secondary education is limited and not very telling. Differing research studies, based on the age at which graduation is measured, place the percentage as low as 1% to as high as 11% (Emerson, 2006; Pecora et al., 2003; Wolanin, 2005). This is in comparison to other youth within the general population of which 30% have a bachelor's degree (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman, 2008). Other studies show that foster youth also have a low rate of college attendance as 30% of 591 21-year- olds in one sample completed at least one year of college as compared to 53% of 21 year olds in a national representative sample (Courtney, 2007).

According to another study, 20% of foster youth are youth who graduated from high school attended college compared to 60% of high school graduates from the general population (Wolanin, 2005).

A clear picture of these statistics is provided from a study conducted in 1998 which showed that out of the more than 20,000 youth that "aged out" of foster care, only 35% of them graduated from high school and of those only 11% went either to college or a vocational school (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004).

A very popular and often cited research study is The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth more popularly known as the "Midwest Study". This was a longitudinal study that has been following a sample of young people from Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois as they transition out of foster care and into young adulthood (Chapin Hall, n.d.).

Participants of the Midwest Study were also asked to participate in the

National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This made it possible to

compare data between the former foster youth of the Midwest Study and the

youth in the general population (Chapin Hall, n.d.).

The baseline survey data in the Midwest Study consisted of 732

participants when they were 17 and 18 years of age. Then they were re-

interviewed at age 19 (n=603), age 21 (n=591), age 23 or 24 (n=602) and at

age 26 (n=596) (Chapin Hall, n.d.).

The Midwest Study found that 70% of former foster youth in one county

study (n=262) expressed a desire to attend college, however only two percent

of them actually entered college (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Another

study in 2005 found that out of 300,000 former foster youth between the ages

of 18 and 25, 150,000 of them graduated from high school and about 30,000

or 20% of them were currently attending a post-secondary education

(Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). In general, studies have found that former

foster youth are less likely to attend college and when they do attend college,

to obtain a degree, when compared to their their non-foster care peers (Day,

Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011).

Some researchers have noted that resilience is a major contributor to

emancipating foster youth doing well after leaving foster care. For example, a

study conducted by Henry (2001) using seven adolescents in the foster care

system who suffered different types of abuse (physical, emotional or sexual)

from their parents or other caregivers, found that despite their experiences, some of them were able to cope well with the abuse they suffered from the hands of their parents and caregivers through resilience. Henry (2001) defined resilience as the capacity of a child to meet a challenge and use it for psychological growth. Also, Osgood and colleagues (2010) reported that the foster youth who do well after emancipation have a propensity to be resilient, which they defined as the ability to overcome difficulties and the ability to recover quickly from stressful events. They also mentioned that the factors that contribute to resiliency come from many venues such as an individuals' skills and personality development, the supportive relationships one has with other people and the inclusion of groups like churches or clubs (Osgood et al., 2010).

An Israeli study conducted by Dinisman and Zeira (2011)explored the readiness to leave care of 272 adolescents in their final year of out-of-home placement using three ecological levels which include individual, social support and institutional characteristics. It was found that individual characteristics and social support from peers and staff contributed to their readiness to leave foster care. However, they also found that these youth reported that their readiness for higher education was lower than their readiness for independent living skills. In other words, they are better prepared to perform functions like meal preparation, grocery shopping and the ability to be in a loving relationship with a partner than they are at choosing a field of

study, and knowing how or where to register for higher education (Dinisman & Zeira, 2011).

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that education alone is the most effective means of reducing poverty, unemployment, deterring crime and lowering incarceration rates (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). Indeed, successful educational achievement is correlated with a greater earning potential, an improved sense of self-worth and an overall personal confidence (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). In addition, early positive educational experiences in life have been linked with a positive youth development, an increase in self-reliance and financial self-sufficiency in adulthood (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Another research study in 2005 noted that 25 to 34 year olds who had at least a bachelor's degree, at an average earned 61% more than those with just a high school diploma (Planty et al., 2007). These well documented research studies draw an obvious link to the importance of increasing a post-secondary education among foster youth. If former foster youth can achieve higher levels of education then they will be less likely to experience unemployment, incarceration, homelessness and overall instability (Day et al., 2011).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Erik Erikson's stages of human development inform us that human beings will go through developmental stages in life. Each of the stages is characterized by achievement of a virtue or a pathology that occurs when they

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fail to achieve a stage virtue (Erikson, 1968). When one fails to master a stage, that individual will carry that pathology on to their next stage of development (Erikson, 1968). Young adults, according to Erikson, are at the developmental stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion. The virtue achieved in this stage is fidelity while the pathology is role confusion (Erikson, 1968).

Youth who leave foster care, do so at a very critical time in their young adult life. This period is plagued with confusion and uncertainty especially since they are still trying to figure out who they are (Erikson, 1968). Some identity crises such as sexual identity might be a problem for youth and can consume most of their time and energy to a point that anything else can be placed as secondary or irrelevant in life.

Unfortunately, one of the areas in life placed at a secondary level tends to be the decision about a post-secondary education. A young adult whose friends are not planning to obtain post-secondary education will most likely not enroll into post-secondary education due to the strong influence that peers exert on each other at this stage in life. At this stage in a youth's life, where friendship is very important and peer influence is highly pronounced, a young adult might still be unsure as to whether or not he or she wants to enroll in post-secondary education. Also, this crucial stage is where young adults learn to make commitments, either to a person, a career or to both. Unfortunately, many of them choose to make commitments to romantic relationships than to a post-secondary education.

In order to assist foster youth in developing a healthy identity and a future that includes a post-secondary education, professionals who work with them should learn how to guide them to make positive decisions by themselves instead of making the decisions for them. This will make foster youth more accepting of their decision and more committed to follow through with it. Also, foster youth should be treated more like adults instead of children and be made to feel that their opinion counts. These efforts will most likely catapult them to a level where they will feel confident enough to make plans for their future, including plans to get a post-secondary education. Foster youth should also be encouraged to form relationships with peers who have aspirations to further their education past high school.

It can therefore be hypothesized based on this theory that foster youth who are treated as partners and are encouraged to make decisions by themselves are more likely to attend or enroll in post-secondary education. It can also be hypothesized that foster youth who have friends that are enrolled in a post-secondary education are more likely to attend or enroll in post-secondary education.

Another theory this study will look at is systems theory. In systems theory an individual is a part of a system or process that allows for self-regulation and homeostasis. When one part of the system or process is out of equilibrium, this in turn affects the other system or parts. This means that the cause of the problem will be seen as lying within the framework of the foster

care system and or other related systems (such as family, schools, friendships, etc.), of which foster care youth are already a part of. Through the use of systems theory, the solution to low rates of college enrollment among foster youth will be in the correction of a system process. Currently, the foster care system has implemented varied programs such as Independent Living Programs and Transitional Conference to help assist foster care youth succeed in life. Both of these programs take place before the youth emancipates from foster care and both of these focus on life skills and goal completion aimed at improving foster care outcomes. With the focus of post-secondary enrollment in mind, this study will see how foster youth interact within the foster care system and other systems, and see if the processes can be more effective at helping foster youth achieve post-secondary education.

Summary

According to studies, not much is known about former foster youth who are enrolled in, or have attained a post-secondary education. The legislative sector has come a long way in putting in place policies and programs that are geared towards propelling foster youth into going to college. However, a lot of work still needs to be done in this area. Several studies mentioned numerous barriers that keep this population from succeeding in the real world of independent living and post-secondary educational achievement. On a positive note, encouraging factors have been cited in several studies and provide a sense of hope and optimism for this population. Lastly, the theories

that guide the understanding of this population and this research are found in

Erik Erickson's stages of human development and Systems Theory.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall design of this research project in regard to its specific purpose of determining which factors are correlated with post-secondary educational enrollment among foster youth. The research design in this chapter is broken down according to the following: the study design, the sampling method, the data collection and instruments, procedures and data analysis.

Study Design

This exploratory mixed-methods research was conducted for the purpose of exploring the factors that contribute to foster youth enrolling into post-secondary education. Specifically, this study utilized quantitative self-administered questionnaires and qualitative interviews to explore and to understand what factors the study participants believe aided them to enroll in post-secondary education. Foster youth were defined as current and or emancipated foster youth who are 18 years and older, who live independently or in a foster home, transitional housing, legal guardian's home, or host family home. Post-secondary education was defined as any schooling beyond that of a high school diploma which can include vocational or certificate training, junior college, and or four-year College.

The quantitative portion of this study was completed through use of self-administered questionnaires that were aimed at obtaining basic demographic information of participants as well as basic foster care information. Specific to obtaining foster care information, participants were asked to respond to 15 questions through a simple "yes" or "no" answer format. The use of the self-administered questionnaire allowed for greater participation of people in less time than it would take to interview them (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). The self-administered questionnaires were also less intrusive and could be completed at the participants' own pace with no pressure to provide responses to an interviewer (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). The disadvantage of self-administered questionnaires was that it may not have captured all the relevant data due to poorly constructed questions or it may not have asked the right questions at all. Another disadvantage was that the self-administered questionnaires did not allow for the opportunity to clarify responses with participants (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011).

The qualitative portion of this study was completed through use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Research participants were asked a series of ten open-ended questions and one closed ended question, all of which were intended to obtain participant perspectives on which factors influenced them to enroll in post-secondary education. Probes were utilized as appropriate to elicit information from participants. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed participants the freedom to answer questions in their

own words, using their own style, without feeling constrained or inhibited (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). This ultimately increased the truthfulness of the answers provided by participants and allowed for personal experience to be included in the research. One of the disadvantages of utilizing semi-structured face-to-face interviews was that the answers yielded were more difficult to code than those obtained through use of the self-administered questionnaire.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was the method chosen to obtain data from participants that best fitted the criteria of this research study. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to focus on a specific target population whose characteristics may be generalized to a larger population with similar characteristics (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). Due to the nature of purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) generalization is more difficult and this type of sampling can be prone to researcher bias (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). Snowball sampling was encouraged among foster youth willing to participate in this study. Overall, this study obtained the input from 16 foster youth.

Data Collection and Instruments

To determine which factors contributed to foster youth's enrollment in post-secondary education, information was gathered through a self-administered questionnaire and a semi-structured face-to-face interview guide. The self-administered questionnaires consisted of 29 questions and was

administered in paper format. (See Appendix A for self-administered questionnaire). The semi-structured face-to-face interview guide consisted of10 open-ended questions and one close-ended question (11 total). (See Appendix B for interview guide). After completion of the self-administered questionnaire, the interview was conducted by one researcher while the other researcher listened and took notes. Additionally, information during these interviews was gathered through use of audio recording and was transcribed for data analysis. Appropriate consent for the audio recording of the interviews was obtained prior to the interviews.

Common themes and responses were identified through data analysis. The dependent variables in this study are ordinal in terms of measurement and were defined as any schooling beyond that of a high school diploma. The independent variables in this study are ordinal and nominal in terms of measurement and included demographic data of participants as well as factors categorized into three overall categories: systemic based, relationship based and individually based. These variables were measured through use of descriptive statistics in order to examine the areas of influence participants attributed in their decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

Currently, there are no known standardized instruments that measure factors (systemic, relationship and individual) among foster youth that correlate with enrollment in post-secondary education that captured the necessary data for this study. Therefore, the self-administered questionnaire

and interview guide questions were created by the researchers for this study. The questions were formulated based on information found in the literature review, as well as researchers open mind to factors not mentioned in the literature reviews that can be attributed to foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education. This allowed researchers the opportunity to ask questions based on factors (systemic, relationship, resiliency) previously identified in literature reviews as having a high correlation with educational attainment and provided the flexibility needed to ask questions beyond specific factors identified in the literature reviews.

Limitations to the self-administered questionnaire and interview guide were that the instruments may not have captured all factors relevant to the study, also low content validity and low reliability. Other limitations include possible untruthful responses by participants and the right of participants not to answer all questions, which in turn may lead to improper summation of the data (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011).

<center>Procedures</center>

Interviews with foster youth were conducted on campus at Cal State San Bernardino or in an appropriate public setting comfortable to the participant. Foster youth identified for this research were recruited from any institutional or personal contact from which participant contact could be obtained ethically and lawfully through flyer postings. Qualified foster youth participants were also recruited from Cal State San Bernardino's Extended

<center>25</center>

Opportunity Program (EOP) Foster Youth Program through flyers. Appropriate

permission was obtained from agencies to distribute flyers with information on

how interested participants could contact the researchers.

After the initial contact, the participant was given the self-administered

questionnaire to complete with no help or guidance from the researchers. After

completion of the self-administered questionnaire, the face to face semi-

structured interview began. The interview process (including both self-

administered questionnaire and interview) took approximately 9 minutes to 43

minutes and averaged a total of 19 minutes to complete. Participants received

fifteen dollars cash incentive as compensation for their time.

Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants was protected at all

times. This included both informed consent of voluntary participation and

possible risks or benefits for participants. (See Appendix C for informed

consent.) Debriefing statements, that included appropriate contact information,

were provided to all participants should they have felt the need to discuss the

topic further (See appendix D for debriefing statement). To uphold

confidentiality of all participants, identifiable participant data was not collected

throughout the process. Instead, participant identification was tracked with

participant numbers. All data collected was securely kept in locked drawers, in

private rooms with no access to outsiders, as well as secured flash drives kept

in private secure locations. After completion of the data analysis, any and all

data was destroyed.

Data Analysis

This exploratory research project sought to find out which factors

contributed to post-secondary enrollment among foster youth. The data

collected through use of the self-administered questionnaire and interview

guide was utilized to identify these factors. Interview data was transcribed.

Secondly, the data was categorized based on first level coding (concrete and

identifiable data evident in the text) and second level coding (involves

interpreting the meaning portrayed in the data). This data was then converted

into quantifiable data only where it was appropriate to do so.

The researchers used the method of constant comparative analysis to

analyze interview data and code it into themes or codes. This method of

analysis does not try to quantify interview facts but does acknowledge that

qualitative data does require systematic analysis (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). All

qualitative analysis data involves coding data into, themes, then categories, in

order to form conclusions (Jasper, 1994). The value of qualitative research

methods is the emphasis of an individual's experience and views from real life

situations (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). The researchers through constant

comparative analysis have attempted to extract these views and experiences.

The categories and themes from this study were identified by each researcher

individually, first by reviewing the data in one interview and then by reviewing

the data in another interview and so forth. Research identifies comparison as the dominant principle of the traditional analysis process in qualitative research (Boeije, 2002). Therefore the researchers, in the process of reviewing data from one interview to the next, made comparison of emerging categories and themes and when possible grouped them together. Finally, the researchers met together for the purpose of comparing the categories and themes derived from the interviews and merged the dominant themes together into one data grouping.

The overall factors identified in this study were considered to be independent variables to the dependent variable of post-secondary education enrollment. Through use of descriptive statistics, the areas of influence participants attributed to their decision to enroll in post-secondary education, were examined. Computation of the data involved simple descriptive statistics such as frequency of distribution in order to determine the highest frequency factors between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The intent of the data analysis was to determine which factors (systemic, relationship, individual), themes and or categories were more significant in former foster youths' decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

Summary

This chapter has covered the overall design of this research project in regard to its specific purpose and processes employed to determine what factors contribute to post-secondary educational enrollment among foster

youth. The research design in this chapter was broken down according to the

following areas: the study design, the sampling method, the data collection

and instruments, the procedures and data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This section presents data obtained through the use of a self-administered questionnaire and participant interviews. The data gathering process was designed to explore and capture each participant's perspective on the factors they felt contributed to their enrollment in post- secondary education. Through the use of the self–administered questionnaire, participants' demographics data were collected. The self–administered questionnaire also contained fifteen "yes" or "no" questions that indicated which possible factors influenced the participants' decision to enroll into a post-secondary education. These responses were further explored in qualitative interviews, from which, specific themes will be presented in the following categories: decision, support, influence, college importance, type of academic student and study habits. Also, participants' quotes were used to support each major theme in order to provide a richer understanding about their view of which factors helped them enroll in college.

Presentation of the Findings

Self – Administered Questionnaire, Demographics

The sample was drawn from former and current foster youth who are 18 years old and older. There were total of (16) participants, all of which were

identified as having enrolled in a post-secondary education. Each participant

was given a self-administered questionnaire in order to provide demographic

information such as age, gender and race. The participants comprised of (5)

males and (11) females with an age range of 18-30 years. A total of (9) were

African American, (2) Caucasian, (3) Hispanic, (1) Native American, (1) Not

Stated. Age of participants at the time they entered foster care ranged from

less than one year of age to fourteen years of age. The total years spent in

foster care ranged from less than one year to eighteen years of age. Total time

spent in college ranged from less than one year to seven years and units

completed varied in response as some participants indicated earning at least a

degree. A total of three (3) participants chose not to answer. Overall, units

completed ranged from 0 units to 142. Additionally, participants were asked

about foster care experience, school status, employment status, living status,

transportation status, school funding and desired educational goal as part of

the demographic data collected. See Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Gender (N = 16)		
Male	5	31.3
Female	11	68.8
Age		
18	2	12.5

19	5	31.3
21	1	6.3
22	3	18.8
23	1	6.3
25	1	6.3
26	2	12.5
30	1	6.3

Ethnicity

African American	9	56.3
Caucasian	2	12.5
Hispanic	3	18.8
Native American	1	6.3
None Stated	1	6.3

Age at Foster Care Entry (In Years)

0	1	6.3
1	1	6.3
6	1	6.3
7	3	18.8
8	2	12.5
10	2	12.5
11	2	12.5
12	2	12.5
13	1	6.3
14	1	6.3

Length of time in Foster Care (In Years)

0	1	6.3
2	1	6.3
4	1	6.3
5	1	6.3
6	3	18.8
7	2	12.5
9	1	6.3
10	1	6.3
11	1	6.3
12	1	6.3
17	1	6.3
18	2	12.5

How Long in College (In

Years)

0	5	31.3
1	2	12.5
2	1	6.3
3	2	12.5
4	2	12.5
6	2	12.5
7	2	12.5

Number of Units Completed

None	1	6.3
Not Answered	3	18.8
Bachelor's Degree	1	6.3
One Quarter	1	6.3
2nd Year Graduate Student	1	6.3
12	1	6.3
14	1	6.3
16	1	6.3
50	1	6.3
58	1	6.3
72	1	6.3
80	1	6.3
130	1	6.3
142	1	6.3

Experience in Foster Care

Good	3	18.8
Bad	0	0
Good and Bad	12	75
Other	1	6.3

School Status

Full Time	11	68.8
Part Time	2	12.5
Not Attending	3	18.8

Employment Status

Full Time	6	37.5
Part Time	2	12.5
Other	1	6.3

None	6	37.5
Part time and working at school	6	37.5

Current Living Status

Living Alone	4	25
Living with partner/spouse	4	25
With Roommates	7	43.8
Guardians	1	6.3

Primary Form of Transportation

Car	11	68.8
Bus	2	12.5
Bus/Walk	3	18.8

Type of School Funding

Loans	2	12.5
Grants	6	37.5
Loans/Grants/ Scholarships	3	18.8
Loans/Grants	4	25
Grants/Scholarships	1	6.3

Educational Goal

Certificate	1	6.3
Bachelors	7	43.8
Masters	6	37.5
PhD	2	12.5

Self – Administered Questionnaire, "Yes" or "No" Questions

In addition to the demographic data collected, the self-administered questionnaire contained fifteen "yes" or "no" questions. These questions name possible factors such as self, friends, families, programs, etc. that influenced the participant's decision to enroll into a post-secondary education. Overall,

the questions were separated into three main categories in order to find out what factors helped former foster youth enroll into a post-secondary education the most. The three categories of questions are: systemic, relationship and individual. The questions contained in the aforementioned three categories, were meant to identify the most influential factors in the participants' decision making process.

Question 15 and questions 25 through 29 were categorized as being individual based questions. See Table 2. Of note, is that half or more of the participants indicated that college enrollment was something they wanted to do as a child and that their personal faith was influential in the decision making process. Thirteen of the participants indicated that enrolling in college was a decision they made alone and that it was something they felt they could accomplish. Fifteen of the participants indicated that college enrollment was a personal goal and that it gave them hope for the future. These responses indicate a strong influence of individuality in the decision making process to enroll in college.

Questions 16 through 18 were categorized as being systemic based questions (See Table 3). Of note, is that more than half of the participants indicated that college enrollment was something they did not receive support in from any social worker (question 17) or foster care program (question 18). Nine of the participants indicated that they were in foster care when they enrolled in college. This is significant because it is expected that since the

participants were still in foster care when they enrolled in college, they would have the most benefit from social workers and or foster care programs to enroll in college. However, this was not the case based on participants' low responses to questions 17 and 18. These responses indicate a weak systemic influence in the decision making process to enroll in college.

Questions 19 to 24 were categorized as being relationship based (See Table 4). Twelve of the participants indicated that they were motivated to enroll in college by a family member (foster or biological). Ten of the participants indicated that they were motivated to enroll in college because of a friendship. Of note in this study however, is that half or less of the participants indicated that when they enrolled in college they did not have friends or family (foster or biological) already in college or have friends and family (foster or biological) that graduated from college. These responses indicate a strong relationship influence in the decision making process to enroll in college but not from friends or family with college experience.

There were a total of 96 "yes" responses possible for questions categorized as being individual based. Participants in this category responded with a "yes" answer a total of 74 times, which is 77.08% of the total possible "yes" responses. For questions categorized as being systemic based, there were a total of 48 "yes" responses possible. Participants in this category responded with a "yes" answer a total of 18 times, which is 37.5% of the total possible "yes" responses. For questions categorized as being relationship

based, there were a total of 96 "yes" responses possible. Participants in this

category responded with a "yes" answer a total of 47 times, which is 48.98% of

the total possible "yes" responses. Based on these percentages, the

individual category showed to have the most influential factors in the decision

making process to enroll in college (77.08%). The second highest category to

have the most influential factors in the decision making process to enroll in

college was relationship (48.95%). Lastly, very few participants reported that

their decision to enroll in college was influenced on the factors listed for

questions categorized as being systemic (37.50%).

Table 2. Questions 15, 25 through 29, Individual Based Questions

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Q15. Did you make the decision to go to college alone?		
Yes	13	81.3
No	3	18.8
Q25. Did you enroll in college because it was a personal goal?		
Yes	15	93.8
No	1	6.3
Q26. Did you enroll in college because it was something that you wanted to do as a child?		
Yes	8	50
No	8	50

Q27. Did you feel that attending college was something you could accomplish?

Yes	13	81.3
No	2	12.5
Yes and No	1	6.3

Q28. Did you enroll in college because it gave you hope for the future?

Yes	15	93.8
No	1	6.3

Q29. Did your faith influence you to enroll in college?

Yes	10	62.5
No	6	37.5

Table 3. Questions 16 through 18, Systemic Based Questions

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Q16. Were you in foster care when you enrolled in college?		
Yes	9	56.3
No	7	43.8
Q17. Did you receive support from any social worker (any type) or CFS Educational Liaison to enroll in college?		
Yes	5	31.3
No	11	68.8

Q18. Did you receive support from any program (ILP, EFC/AB12) to enroll in college?

Yes	4	25
No	12	75

Table 4. Questions 19 through 24, Relationship Based Questions

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Q19. Did any friendships motivate you to attend college?		
Yes	10	62.5
No	6	37.5
Q20. Did any family member (foster or biological) motivate you to attend college?		
Yes	12	75
No	4	25
Q21. When you enrolled in college, did you have friends already in college?		
Yes	8	50
No	8	50
Q22. When you enrolled in college, did you have family (foster or biological) already in college?		

Yes	6	37.5
No	10	62.5

Q23. Before you enrolled in college, did you have friends that graduated from college?

Yes	4	25
No	12	75

Q24. Before you enrolled in college, did you have family (foster or biological) that graduated from college?

Yes	7	43.8
No	9	56.3

Qualitative Interview Data

After completion of the self-administered questionnaire, participants were interviewed and asked 11 questions (10 open-ended questions and one close-ended question). The interviews ranged from 9 minutes to 43 minutes and averaged a total of 19 minutes. The participants were asked to share their thoughts about their decision to go to college with questions that explored their response in the following domains: decision, support, influence, college importance, type of academic student and study habits. When necessary, participants' responses were probed in order to better understand their responses.

Decision

It is important to understand how and when participants made their decision to pursue a post-secondary education. The majority of the participants, nine, stated that they decided to go to college while in high school. Two participants stated that they made the decision after high school. Three participants stated that they made the decision while in middle school. Two participants reported that they made the decision while in elementary school and one participant said the decision came while in pre-school. When discussing how they came up with the decision to go to college, several factors emerged including self-interest, biological family, self-motivation, friend/mentor and foster family.

Self-Interest

Of the 16 participants, 5 of them stated that they decided to go to college due to self-interest which included – love of sports, the need to leave foster care, love of photography, the need to extend their foster care stay and seeing college as the only option for a better life.

> When I was in high school, my junior year, I started looking into colleges and trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I joined a photography program in my junior year. So then going into my senior year I wanted to go apply for a photography school (Participant 4, personal interview, November 2014).

Biological Family

Of the 16 participants, 4 of them stated that they were motivated to attend college due to the encouragement and or inspiration they received from family members like their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and uncles.

Well, I was raised by my grandmother. She always tells me, well, "When will you leave to college?" And I was like "I don't know". And she said, "Well you… she's like you leave home when you're going for college. That's when you can leave home." And so ever since then she invested that inside of my brain. I had that ever since I was little (Participant 7, personal interview, November 2014).

Self-Motivation

Of the 16 participants, 5 of them reported that they were self-motivated to enroll in college and remain in college against all odds.

Well, initially it wasn't my decision to go to college first because it was more my mother's dream. The more and more older that I got the more maturity that I got and through being in foster care and everything, I learned fast that college was something that I really, really wanted to pursue in my life and succeed in. And I basically put my mother's dream and my self-motivation together and pretty much made it my mission to go ahead and to go to high school to do well in high school, to do the best that I could so that I was able to go to college (Participant 9, personal interview, December, 2014).

Friend/Mentor

      Of the 16 participants, 4 of them reported that they made the decision to attend college because people like their friends, neighbors, teachers and caregivers instilled the importance of college in them. These people recognized and believed in the participants' ability to advance their education past high school even when they doubted or failed to recognize the same ability within themselves.

> I actually had a lot of friends that really pushed it on me as well as my legal guardians who were my foster parents. I don't know, it's just… they believed in me. And so I think that was really the reason that I wanted to go because like I said, I didn't think I was capable. I didn't think I was able. And then, just hearing the continuous confirmation, the continuous encouragement of family and friends and people who were there in the situation or had been in the situation of going to college telling me, "You can do it; You are able; You are capable of doing it". I think that really pushed and drove me to make the initial decision and the final decision to just say, "Hey, maybe I can try it. Maybe, I can just give it a shot. And so I did (Participant 16, personal interview, January 2015).

Of the 16 participants, 3 of them reported that they decided to enroll in college because their foster family recognized, encouraged and believed in their ability to advance their education past high school.

My foster mom's biological daughter was going to college and I looked up to her. She was pretty much my only role model at the time and I was interested in everything. She'd come home and talk about what she learned and I wanted to be like her. (She) would push me pretty much to do good for myself, better myself as a person (Participant 15, personal interview, January 2015).

Support

The participants were asked to share the type of support, if any, they had received to enroll into a post-secondary education. The majority of participants, except for 4, stated that they received some type of support. Two themes emerged in the types of support received. They include systemic support and non-systemic support. It is important to note that some participants reported that they received both types of support. In many cases, they saw the support of a social worker as being minimal or lacking a "hands-on" approach.

So it's like they (social workers) come in, they stay for an hour or a couple of hours and most of that is just talking to us. It's not even going over stuff. It's just, "Hey, how are you?" So we get to know the social

workers and stuff like that and like I said, it's not like they have much to

talk about. It's like, "Hey, you're doing well in school. You're doing well

here. You're doing well here." But I will say that a lot of times, I think

that social workers, there's not enough of them. Each social worker is

given 50 cases, so they got 85 kids calling them on a day-to-day basis

and of course they can't get back to them all. And so that was my issue

with it. Sometimes I'd call a social worker, I'd call my worker, and they

wouldn't get back to me for another week and a half. And so it was like

by the time they got back to me, it was either too late or I had already

found out and done something about it (Participant 16, personal

interview, January 2015).

No, I would say they did their job but you have those social workers

who do their job and you have those that go the extra mile. None of

them really actually went the extra mile. They did what they needed to

do…. They pitched college, or going to college, more so the cliché

statements: "Yeah, you should go to college." but not enough that

wowed me like my mentor. Maybe it's because of the fact that I spent

so much time with my mentor. So I would say not really, they did what

they needed to do, they didn't go the extra mile (participant 1, personal

interview, November 2014).

Of the 16 participants, 6 identified as having received systemic support through high school college preparatory programs like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), college program like EOPS (Extended Opportunity Program Services), assistance from teachers, school counselors, college foster youth liaison, and social workers. All participants mentioned that the most helpful type of support was a "hands-on" approach to support. This type of support includes assistance with completion of FAFSA forms, college applications and assistance with enrollment for classes. Participants receiving assistance from EOPS reported their assistance to be more "hands-on".

And actually, most of my motivation and support came from the Education Opportunity Program. And they basically supported me in enrolling in college and signing all the contracts, all the forms and everything (Participant 9, personal interview, December 2014).

And I went to that school and they really prepped us for college and they pushed education unto us. It's a school with a sorry excuse for an athletic program. But if anything, they really taught us hard work, they taught us dedication. And as far as preparing us for college, really what they did was pushed education, pushed academics. And then we got involved in the K-16 Bridge Program which upon completion will give you priority registration to Victor Valley College. And so that's what they did. And although I will say that my high school did have us file the

FAFSA, have us file a few other things which was indeed helpful. But as far as the actual enrollment and finding classes and finding courses and creating a schedule, it was like I didn't know anything (Participant 16, personal interview, January 2015).

Yes, AVID is Advancement Via Individual Determination so it's literally a college preparation program in high school and middle school, but that was it as far as programs in high school, yes, that was it. As far as educational support, our AVID teachers like my senior AVID teacher in high school. ..We would have days when we would go in the lab and they would literally teach us how to do SATs and ACTs and we would actually apply to college, during school hours. So that's the educational support I had and then he would actually have some of his students who were in college come in to speak to us, so we had a lot of educational support and presentations, just to see what is was like, for real (participant 6, personal interview, November 2015).

Some participants reported to have participated in Independent Living Program (ILP) but further stated that the program did not provide a "hands-on" support approach toward college enrollment. Instead, participants reported that the assistance they received from ILP was more beneficial in helping them to find employment and housing but not college enrollment. Participants stated that ILP's organized college tours were helpful but that they would have benefited more if a hands-on support approach to college was offered. All

participants reported that they were intimidated by the college enrollment process but that perhaps, they would have been less intimidated if they would have had more of a "hands-on" type of support through it.

> With pursing college career, they (ILP) did not help. The only thing they supported me with is help me with how to find the right car for transportation, and just a couple of life skills that's all (Participant 9, Personal interview, December 2014).

Non-Systemic Support

Of the 16 participants, 6 of them reported that during the process of enrolling into a post-secondary education, they received support from mentors, friends, neighbors, aunts, siblings (both foster and biological) and church members. Support received range from the giving of information on benefits/programs participants can qualify for, to helping with college application, FAFSA application and registration for college classes.

> And luckily though, I had a neighbor right next door to me who was at VVC for a while. And so he told me, "Come over tomorrow when you're going to register or before you register and we'll sit down and we'll plan out your schedule. We'll plan out everything." And so he was gracious enough to give up his time and really teach me the ropes, show me the ropes (Participant 16, personal interview, January 2015).

> Well, to be honest I didn't get a whole lot of support to actually enroll in college. My mentor - he didn't necessarily push me to do it but he would

talk about it, whether it's going to school or picking up a tray (at McDonald's). Like I said, he would pitch college and do something. He really wanted me to go in for nursing because he said the medical field is really booming and it would be a promising future so he would try to plug me in with different things and shadowing people and going to the hospitals with his connections. I knew that wasn't really for me but I still did anyway because he would always encourage me to try everything once, twice if you like it, with the exception of drugs. So I did it. And like I said, he was pretty much the only driving force, everybody else was kind of like … "You should attend college." But they weren't really trying to give me the tools to attend (Participant 1, personal interview, November 2014).

Influence

All of the participants reported that they had been influenced to enroll in college. Some of them stated that they were influenced by the desire to have a better life for themselves and for their families. Others stated that they were influenced to enroll in college due to life lessons learned by themselves or vicariously. Some reported that having a place to live (housing) influenced them to go to college. Others reported that they were influenced by their parents, caregivers and friends. Some of the participants simply stated that they saw college a necessary thing to do in life.

<u>Better Future</u>

One of the dominant themes that emerged was the participants' need or desire to have a better future for themselves and their families (both present and future families). Nine of the sixteen participants reported that they were influenced to go to college for this purpose.

Just a better life, I have never really been a big fan of college. I don't technically like it but I know it's something that I could use. So I would say the more tools you have in the box, the better you could build a house (Participant 1, personal interview, November 2014).

"I think because I wanted something better for myself; and high school wasn't enough" (Participant 3, personal interview, November 2014).

<u>Life Lessons</u>

Seven of the sixteen participants reported that the lessons they drew from life events they experienced influenced them to go to college, such as: being told by significant adults in their lives that they could never go to college because they were too dumb or too stupid. Consequently, they were motivated by the need or desire to prove these people wrong. Other responses given by some participants included the fact that they witnessed negative resultant effects due to the lack of college education on their family of origin such as manifest poverty. They did not want to end up in poverty like their parents.

What influenced me? A career and just seeing my family dynamics and a lot of failures within my family, I didn't want that to be me… Just being

talked down to and I always thought that I would end up like my mother

who was never in a good place throughout her life. That's what

motivated me to go on a career path (Participant 12, personal interview,

December 2014).

I don't want to live like I lived in the past. It wasn't a good childhood, it

wasn't a good experience and I didn't want to repeat that. I thought

about it a lot. I knew I wanted kids and I didn't want them to live that

way either so that's when I said I need to further my education. I need

to go out and have a good career and just establish myself (Participant

15, personal interview, January 2015).

"I'd say my aunt and uncle did but knowing that nobody really went to

college or graduated from high school in my house, it was the thing to

do" (Participant 11, personal interview, November, 2014).

College as a Necessity

Four of the sixteen participants reported that they were influenced to

enroll in college because they saw college as a necessity of life.

For me it was just more so I wanted to play basketball so I have to go to

school in order to go to play, you know what I mean? And so when I

signed up it was more to me just doing it, because of why I wanted to

initially do it. … It was just like, I wanted to play sports so that was

initially why I go to school (Participant 2, personal interview, November

2014).

<u>Self-Motivation</u>

Four of the sixteen participants reported that when self-motivation is lacking, one is most unlikely to attend college, irrespective of how much support, motivation, influence and inspiration he or she received from others.

I'll say myself because I didn't really have that much support. I've been in foster care alone for a while. I didn't really have family support so basically me. I decided to just advance my education (Participant 14, personal interview, January 2015).

I will say, just being in high school throughout the 4 years of education, I don't think that it will be that hard for you to go to college, continue your education further. So I thought that it would be good for me to further my education more than just high school (Participant 10, personal interview, November 2014).

When participants were asked what they felt was the most influential factor, based on the questions 15 through 29 they had answered "yes" to, questions 25 (Did you enroll in college because it was a personal goal?) and questions 28 (Did you enroll in college because it gave you hope for the future?) received the most responses (5 each) for being the most influential. When participants were asked what they felt was the least influential factor, based on the questions 15 through 29 they had answered "yes" to, questions 19 (Did any friendship motivate you to attend college?) received the most responses (5 total) for being the least influential.

Table 5. Questions 16 through 18, Systemic Based Questions		
Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage
On questions 15 to 29 (from the self-administered questionnaire), that you answered yes to, which one would you rate the highest (i.e. most important, most influential)?		
Question 15	1	6.3
Question 20	2	12.5
Question 24	1	6.3
Question 25	5	31.3
Question 26	1	6.3
Question 28	5	31.3
Question 29	1	6.3
On questions 15 to 29 (from the self-administered questionnaire), that you answered yes to, which one would you rate the lowest (i.e. least important, least influential)?		
Question 17	2	12.5
Question 19	5	31.3
Question 20	2	12.5
Question 21	1	6.3
Question 24	2	12.5
Question 25	1	6.3
Question 26	1	6.3
Question 27	1	6.3
No Answer	1	6.3

College Importance

Participants were also asked what made them to consider college an important thing to do. All participants stated that they view college to be important. However, they gave different reasons as to why they felt college was important. The most dominant themes as to why college was important had to do with participants seeing college as a path to a better life and better career path. Some stated that it is important for them to go to college so they can assist other foster youth and be positive role models. One participant stated that college was a way of escape from ongoing foster care. Another mentioned that college was important because it helped her meet eligibility criteria for extended foster care.

Better Life

Ten of the sixteen participants noted that college is very important to them because it will help them to better themselves in their lives.

> Because I didn't want to be strung-out or homeless or wondering how
> can I get my next meal. I knew that getting into education will be the
> only way for me to live or better yet do something that I wanted to do
> (Participant 7, personal interview, November 2014).

> "It's important to me because I really wanted to have a good future and
> I really wanted to advance to do something that I'll be proud of or that

will benefit me in the future. That's why I really decided to, I just really

wanted to" (Participant 14, personal interview, January 2015).

But I just said, just a better life, I have never really been a big fan of

college, I don't technically like it but I know it's something that I could

use. So I would say the more tools you have in the box the better you

can build a house (participant 15, personal interview, November 2014).

Truly the main goal of my mind is my success, because I wanted to

become successful and not only that, but I wanted to be the first

generation in my family to graduate from college, so that's why it was

important to me to enroll in college (Participant 9, personal interview,

November 2014).

Career Path

College was important to four of the sixteen participants because it will

help them attain their desired career path. Some participants mentioned not

knowing what it was that they wanted to be but that while they were in college,

they were able to realize what career choice they wanted to pursue. It is

noteworthy to mention that five participants reported that they wanted to major

in Social Work.

It was important for me to enroll in college because of all the

advantages that I can take advantage of prior to become a graduate.

More opportunities for job openings, higher pay, opportunity to

advancement to go on to receive a master degree, PHD, whatever I

really wanted to pursue (Participant 9, personal interview, November

2014).

"I feel that it was important for me to enroll in college, because college

is- I feel like another step to my career. It will help me understand more

about my career" (Participant 10, personal interview, November 2014).

Type of Academic Student

Participants were asked to describe the type of academic students that

they were in middle school and high school in order to assess whether early

academic performance plays a role in the youths' decision to enroll into post-

secondary education. Five participants described themselves as being both

poor and good students, based on the letter grades they received during

different grade levels. Others described themselves as average students. Still

others said they were outstanding students in either middle or high school or

both.

Varied

Five (5) participants reported that their grades in middle and high

school fluctuated. Of these five (5) participants, more reported performing

poorly in middle school with Ds and Fs and getting better grades of Cs and

above in high school, or vice versa.

In middle school, I was really good. I had mostly A's and B's in middle

school and then I hit high school, I didn't really start off as good. I

started off with Fs and I moved up my sophomore year, junior year,

senior year, I got way better. I made the honor roll two times so I got

better. It was good (Participant 14, personal interview, January 2015).

Like I said, I struggled. I had no interest in school. I would go up and

down. Say sixth grade, I had B's. Seventh grade, I got A's and B's.

Eighth grade, I barely graduated. I lost interest. … But I passed with all

C's. It wasn't the best; same for high school (Participant 15, personal

interview, January 2015).

<u>Average</u>

Eight (8) people stated that they were average students with grades of

Bs or Cs.

In middle school and high school I would probably say I was a B-C

student. B, basically in the core subjects other than Math. Math was

always a C or a D and I barely passed with Math. But other than that, I

didn't really have an issue or a problem with that or with any other

subject. So I was rather a B or a C, I never really got A's (Participant 1,

personal interview, November 2014).

<u>Outstanding</u>

Nine (9) participants stated that they were outstanding students in

middle school and high school with mostly grades of As and Bs.

Middle school I would have like A B on the roll. I was in track and field

and in high school I would say A B on a roll …and I was in track still.

But I wanted to go in another route, so joined yearbook and I did ASB

(Associated Student Body) (Participant 7, personal interview, November 2014).

I was good. I had all As and Bs in high school, middle school I don't so much remember, I just remember if anything, like I barely passed Government and Government and Geometry was like Cs because I hated those classes and they were hard for me, but other than that it was As and Bs. I graduated high school with a 3.9 (Participant 6, personal interview, November 2014).

Study Habits

Participants were asked to share the type of study habits they employed prior to college and during college. Three (3) of the participants reported that they did not study at all prior to college. Some reported that prior to college, they put in minimal efforts necessary to pass their classes. One participant relied on cramming. One described self as being a procrastinator. Some participants (4) utilized the assistance of friends and teachers to tutor them on difficult subjects, like Math. One participant reported that he used online study games and two (2) participants said they were hardworking students.

I would just ask friends for advice if I didn't know the answers to questions. If I didn't understand something, I would ask them. I was one of those students who weren't scared to talk to the teacher. Sometimes I was the teacher's pet, so I would just go directly to them and ask them

before class or afterwards (Participant 4, personal interview, November 2014).

All participants reported that they have better study habits in college. Their college study habits include; self-education, color-coordination, use of online flashcards, study groups, rewriting information. Only one participant reported procrastination as a lingering habit but plans to do better. They all reported that having a better study habit is very vital in college in order to pass classes. All participants reported that they want to pass their college classes; therefore, they invest more effort in their studies.

As I have gotten older, matured more, yes they've gotten better. Meaning, I don't wait so much as to the last minute, I prioritize my time. I had it bad with not being able to prioritize my time, I wanted to try to do everything and be everywhere and then if there was time left to kind of studying then doing it, or trying to crunch to the last minute. Whereas now, I am more focused and my mind is right and I am able to prioritize and sit down and I sit this amount of time and I sit there and I do it. So I would say it's just a lot better from then (Participant 1, personal interview, November 2014).

"Still not as good but they're getting better because I'm starting to go home and study for tests so that I don't have to struggle for them, so they're getting better than they were" (Participant 14, personal interview, January 2014).

Summary

This section presented the data obtained through the use of the self-administered questionnaire and participant interviews in an effort to explore and capture the participants' perspective on the factors they felt contributed to their enrollment into post-secondary education. The self-administered questionnaire was used to ascertain which possible factors influenced the participants' decision to enroll into post-secondary education. Also, the qualitative interviews revealed specific themes in several categories which included decision, support, influence, college importance, type of academic student and study habits. Through use of participants' quotes, a richer understanding about which factors facilitated their post-secondary enrollment was obtained.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the major themes discovered from this study and their importance as they relate to foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education. A brief discussion on how the limitations of this study could have influenced the researcher's findings is included in this chapter. In addition, this chapter also discusses recommendations for social work practice, policy and further research regarding foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education.

Discussion

Erikson's Stages of Development

One of the theories used to conceptualize this study was Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968). Part of the findings from this study reveals that foster youth make the decision to attain a post-secondary education, overwhelmingly, during high school years and to a large extent, middle school years and to the least extent, elementary and post-high school years. This is significant because the high school years mark the developmental stage which is characterized by identity development. It is also a stage Erikson (1968) referred to as Identity vs. Role Confusion. This is also

a period when peers and their influence are very pronounced and important (Erikson, 1968).

Based on Erikson's Developmental Stage Theory, this study made the assumption that a foster youth whose friends do not plan to enroll in post-secondary education will most likely not plan to enroll as well. The data, however, did not support this assumption. In fact, the opposite was found to be true, as participants reported that they enrolled in college irrespective of whether their friends enrolled in college or not.

It was also anticipated, based on Erikson's Developmental Stage Theory, that peer influence would be a dominant factor in the college enrollment process. Some participants in this study noted that they were influenced by various peer relationships in their decision to enroll in college. Some stated that they had friends who encouraged them, who they looked up to or who they worked with prior to, and during the process of enrolling in college. Consequently, some peer influence was noted as being part of the decision making process to enroll in college, even though the majority of participants reported that their motivation and influence to pursue a post-secondary education came mostly from their personal goals, self-motivation, or the fact that college gave them hope for the future. Thus, peer influence was an underlying factor despite the fact that most participants stated that they did not have friends in college during the time they made the decision to go to college and the time they enrolled in college.

Finally, based on Erikson's Identity versus Role Confusion developmental stage, this study assumed that post-secondary enrollment would be associated with professionals treating foster youth more like adults and partners in the decision making process, thereby empowering them. Based on this study, it was actually found that foster youth were willing to enroll in post-secondary education because it gave them hope of a better future (career and ability to financially provide for their family) or because their families' circumstances or life events helped them to see college as providing a pathway to a better future. Many youth, in fact, stated that social workers or other professionals, in general, had very little impact toward their decision to enroll in post-secondary education.

Systems Theory

This study also used systems theory as a guide to understanding the process of foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education. While this study made no predictions about how or which systems affected foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education, this study did use systems theory to understand the effectiveness of the systems that took place between foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education. Noted programs mentioned by some participants in this study were Children and Family Services (CFS) programs, like the Independent Living Program (ILP) and Transitional Conference (TC). Other school related programs such as AVID (Advancement

Via Individual Determination) and EOPS (Extended Opportunity Program Services) were also mentioned by participants.

Most participants in this study did not feel that the above mentioned programs had an impact on them enrolling in post-secondary education. Some participants reported not even being aware of the existence and availability of helpful programs. This is an existing issue that was mentioned in a study by Hernandez & Naccarato (2010) where a lack of advocacy was cited as a barrier to school enrollment as many foster youth are not aware they exist. Other participants felt that these programs were not helpful in navigating through the college enrollment process. They credited most of these programs with general life skills development, housing and employment supports. This coincides with a study by Dinisman & Zeira (2011) which found that youth ready to leave out of home placement were more prepared to complete tasks such as meal preparation and grocery shopping than they were able to choose a field of study or register for higher education. What some of the participants mentioned as being effective from few of these programs, were the exposure to college (tours and meeting college students) through (ILP and AVID) and actual "hands on" help given to fill out applications, financial aid, and class enrollment (from EOPS). Many participants lamented and expressed more of a desire to have more "hands on" help given to fill out college applications, financial aid, class selection and registration, as well as assistance in completing the enrollment process for college. This is one of the valuable

inputs received during participant interviews of this study as the college admission process is complex and requires a series of actions that a youth with limited support tends to find overwhelmingly difficult.

Thus, from this study's findings, post-secondary education enrollment/attainment is a process which begins with a decision made mainly during high school, middle school and to some less extent, post-high school and elementary school. This decision is nurtured and reinforced by influential and motivational people, programs, and lessons from personal life experiences. It is further accentuated and solidified by support from family members, friends, mentors, programs. Finally, post-secondary enrollment/education happens as a result of all these combined activities/occurrences in the youth's lives. Apparently, it is a work in progress which takes time to cultivate and mature into fruition.

Significant Themes

There were many significant themes that emerged from this study as it relates to foster youth enrollment in post-secondary education. Through both quantitative and qualitative measures, individual-based factors were the most significant factors to have influenced enrollment in post-secondary education. These individual factors were strongly related to participants' personal goals and to participants' personal perspective that college would give them greater hope for the future or a better life. Relationship factors were the second most influential and Systemic factors were the least influential.

While the study demonstrated strong individual factors, the role of relationships and of systemic supports should not be minimized. Many of the participants spoke of a mentor, a close friend, a family member or a person like "family" that was instrumental in changing their personal self-efficacy. Many participants had both good and bad experiences in foster care, experienced family loss, separation trauma and countless other factors that no doubt had an effect on their self-efficacy. Many participants spoke about having to overcome the negativity of their self-worth and the stigma of being in foster care. To many of the participants, it was that one individual relationship that gave them the confidence to see themselves in a different light and positively affect their self-efficacy to the point that they felt they were able to see themselves obtaining a better life through college. It is at this point that systemic supports become helpful in providing assistance for college.

Housing

This study also found that all the participants had secure and stable housing. While majority of them reported living with roommates, others either lived alone, with a spouse or with a legal guardian. Majority also reported being employed either full time or part time. This finding is in contrast with the finding made by Davis (2006); Geenan & Powers (2007); and Osgood et al (2010) who reported that former foster youth are mostly homeless due to housing instability. Although this might be true of others, it was not true of these participants. However, this does not mean, that some of the participants

did not report that they experienced housing instability at some point while in foster care, as brought about by multiple placements. For example, most of the participants who reported that they had both good and bad experience in foster care attributed some of their bad experience to multiple moves from one caregiver to another, as a result of lack of goodness of fit between them and these caregivers. They also reported that their academic performance was negatively impacted by the emotional, psychological, and environmental hardships brought about by these disruptions. Fortunately, they got to a point in their lives where they had housing stability which allowed them to build positive relationships and focus on important things, like education. It can, therefore, be deduced from this study's finding that having a stable and safe home while in foster care enhances the chances of foster youth doing well academically and ultimately enrolling in post-secondary education.

Limitations

There several noted limitations to this study. First, the quantitative portion of this study was not significant in the overall number of participants involved in the study (a total of 16). Secondly, the qualitative portion of the study captures personal experiences of participants that are subject to interpretation and researcher bias. However, these were controlled through researchers' discussions and careful considerations of each chosen theme, thereby ensuring congruence and bias limitation. Also, the fact that participants were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling also limits

the ability to generalize the study to other foster youth. Another important

limitation is the geographical limits of this study. The participants in this study

represented three counties out of the fifty-eight counties in California. The

researchers acknowledge that programs and services provided to foster youth

can vary by counties and states.

Another limitation of this study is that most of the participants were in

legal guardianship with either relatives or their former foster parents. This

study does not have the bulk majority of the typical foster youth studied by

most researchers. It therefore, seems to suggest that the result from this

finding will most likely be favorable as this group is usually seen as those

foster youth who have fewer difficulties than those mostly studied who are

either in PPLA (Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) or aged out through

PPLA. However, this research did not find much difference between those

participants in legal guardianship and those who remained or exited foster

care through the permanent plan of PPLA.

<div align="center">

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

</div>

<u>Services</u>

The foster youth will benefit from more support and encouragement

from service providers, most especially, the social workers and caregivers.

The information gathered from participants of this study revealed that they do

not get enough or the right assistance from social workers and caregivers

when it comes to college enrollment. Consequently, it is imperative that social workers, caregivers, Educational Liaisons (ELs), Peer and Family Assistants (PFAs), etc. do more to provide these youth with the type of assistance they find to be most beneficial. For example, it is good to remind them about deadline to complete FAFSA application but it is most beneficial if they can be guided to complete the application. The same is the case when applying for college and registering for college classes. The foster youth feel very intimidated, even more so than their counterparts, when it comes to college and the process involved. Having someone to hold their hands throughout the process is a much needed support to these youth.

In addition, it is important for social workers, caregivers and other service providers, to understand the barriers faced by these youth, help them overcome these barriers and empower them to reach their very best potential, especially when it relates to academics. One way this can be achieved is through social worker's monthly assessment. When making contact with the foster children, social workers should go beyond the routine inquiry of how they are doing academically to really having deeper, more meaningful conversation about what they plan to do in the future. This conversation can start from first grade but more detailed information should be sought during middle and high school which is the time most foster youth reported that they first decided to go either go to college or to pursue other form of post-secondary education.

Moreover, CFS will also need to hire more social workers so that social workers can have manageable caseloads. The participants in this study mentioned that social workers' high case load is a barrier to the quality services they could have received from social workers. They stated that social workers do not always keep in touch with clients as frequently as they could because they are inundated with work. They expressed that it will be very helpful if social workers have more manageable caseloads so they can give them the type of assistance and services they need to prosper.

Therefore, it is recommended by the researchers of this study that social work practice moves away from a service-based approach towards foster youth to more of a relationship-based approach towards foster youth. Social work practice must move more toward an agent-of-change role in the spectrum of services provided to foster youth. Providing monthly services to foster youth seems to only support change but not help to create change. Contacts between foster youth and social workers need to be more focused on foster youth's personal goals and their perspective for a better life, since these were the two biggest factors that influence college enrollment.

Psychological/Emotional Support

Other types of support foster youth need for development of the necessary courage to pursue their academic goal past high school are emotional and psychological support. They need to break through the paralyzing, negative self-fulfilling prophecy that is holding them back from

recognizing and believing in their academic and life potential. Some of the participants reported being told, repeatedly, by people like, family members, caregivers and counselors, that they lacked the ability to pursue post-secondary education. Consequently, these youth came to believe and internalize these negative messages that were being told to them. By so doing, they lacked the motivation to pursue post-secondary education until someone they deemed important convinced them they could really make it past high school education.

One way to help them break through this paralyzing, negative self-fulfilling prophesy and develop the needed courage to pursue post-secondary education is through appropriate service referral. When referring these youth for counseling services, the social worker needs to consider these internalized negative messages these youth have about themselves in order to choose the most suitable counselor or therapist for them. For example, therapists/counselors who use the cognitive-behavioral therapy and empowerment perspective will work very well for these youth. Typically, counseling is sought mostly for children with visible behavioral and emotional issues. This practice approach assumes that those children who do not exhibit behavioral or emotional issues do not need counseling. Unfortunately, this is not always the case because a child who is suffering from low self-esteem, lack of motivation, etc due to internalization of the negative messages he or she either received from the birth families or another important person, might

not show any outward sign of this pain. The individual will likely continue to act as though everything is okay and the social workers and caregivers will likely confuse the signs to be a normal personal trait for the child since this child seems to be non-problematic and is doing well in other areas.

Placement Considerations

When placing children in foster homes, the department (CFS) should pay closer attention to the fit of the home and the children being placed. Placing children in a home just based on availability does not bode well with the chances of success of the children. When a child does not have a supportive, loving and caring caregiver, it is difficult for that child to bond with the caregiver Perry (2001).

When there is lack of bonding and attachment, the child lacks the foundation necessary to grow in all areas of life. When this happens, it not only hinders the child's ability to trust his or her environment but that security which allows the child to explore his or her environment is not cultivated Perry (2001). A child who does not have a solid attachment with his/her caregiver does not put academic excellence at the forefront. Rather, the child is more interested in finding ways to survive his/her environment in which he or she does not feel happy or comfortable. Other emotional issues like anger, depression, likely set in, causing more instability in the child's life. Placement disruptions ensue as the emotional discomfort begets behavioral issues. This

gives rise to child being placed in multiple homes which further affects the child's ability to do well academically.

Moreover, when licensing foster parents, it is imperative that Counties and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) license more foster parents who have some college education. Some of the participants in this study revealed that one of the areas where foster children can benefit academically is if they are placed in the home of caregivers who either have college degree or some college education. This group of caregivers can direct or guide a child/youth better when making academic choices that will lead to post- secondary education. However, it is not enough for the caregiver to have college education, but utilizing it to motivate, model, and provide hands-on support to the youth is very crucial to the youth's development of the inspiration, motivation, and the self-confidence to enroll in college or any post-secondary education.

In respect to the youth who reside with their legal guardians and as a result, do not have assigned educational liaisons, CFS has to make provision for them to have educational liaison assistance. This group of people reported that they feel left out of college preparatory services, irrespective of the fact that they participate in ILP. This will entail hiring more educational liaisons and peer and family assistants.

<u>Program Support</u>

The Transitional Conference (TC) meeting is a good avenue to solidify the type of support a youth needs to go the extra mile of applying for and attending college. For example, when discussing the youth's goals, the youth should be encouraged to have as part of his or her goals, the following: 'Complete FAFSA Application' and 'Register for College'. In addition, there has to be someone who will be assigned the responsibility of working with the youth to accomplish these goals and the due date for the goal completion should be noted in the plan (following the regular TC plan format). This individual can either be the foster parent/caregiver, a staff (if youth resides in a group home or transitional housing); a Peer and Family Assistant (PFA) or an Educational Liaison. This will improve the chances of the youth accomplishing these goals. The current practice where the youth just goes home with the TC plan with no one to motivate the youth and ensure that post-secondary academic goals are met does not work very well with these youth. Having the desire to go to college is not enough, in most cases, to ensure enrollment success. For this reason, more support is needed.

Another program that needs improvement is ILP's 'Cash 4 College' Workshop. This is a very supportive class which teaches hands-on FAFSA application completion to ILP eligible youth who participate in ILP. More attention needs to be paid to ensuring that all ILP eligible youth are made aware of the class since they find this type of class to be very supportive and

helpful in their college enrollment endeavors. ILP coordinators have to put more human resources into this class. These additional people will be responsible for ensuring that more youth are informed of this class and more are registered to the class. They should also provide more assistance to those youth who have transportation issues which cause barriers to get to the class by making reliable arrangements ahead of time, to provide transportation to them. Also, Cash 4 College needs to be done earlier than its usual schedule so that more youth can benefit from it. Some youth have already gone through the torment of figuring out how to complete FAFSA before the Cash 4 College class is offered to them.

Recommendations for Policy

A policy change recommendation is for foster youth to be more involved in the development of programs and policy that serve foster youth. They are the experts of their lives; therefore their insights and contributions can help create better and more beneficial programs for them, especially in the area of post-secondary education attainment.

Further recommendation is to decrease foster youth's ILP eligibility age to 14 or 15 years old. This is necessary because this study identified that foster youth typically make the decision to pursue post-secondary education during middle or high school age. By integrating them into ILP services earlier than the current age of 16, they will benefit more in the services and gain more

hands-on support for post-secondary education, as well as the necessary tools

to help them better their lives, in general.

Another recommendation is that in order to increase foster youth

enrollment in post-secondary education, that foster care policy be created to

require social service agencies to increase college attendance among foster

youth aging out of the system to a minimum of 50%. Since college education

has been shown to be the only factor to positively increase life outcomes of

former foster youth, this should not be seen as a lofty policy goal. Many things

can be done to achieve this goal, like requiring that a minimum of one college

tour per year be given to foster care youth. Additionally, social service

agencies can be mandated to have a unit of "college mentors" (much like the

Peer and Family Assistants) to assist and to ensure that the college admission

process is completed with foster youth from beginning to end. Another option

would be to require that a portion of foster care money received on behalf of

foster care youth in permanent planned living arrangements be set aside in a

college fund.

Recommendations for Research

One of the areas that will benefit from further research is the

examination of the two foster care youth categories: those foster youth in

legal guardianship and those in PPLA (Planned Permanent Living

Arrangement) to see if they have different outcomes in respect to post-

secondary education attainment or enrollment. If so, which one has a better

outcome and why? This is especially important with the introduction of the EFC (Extended Foster Care) which is designed to give foster youth better outcomes for the future. One of the major differences for these two groups is that while those in PPLA (The Non Minor Dependents) can move from one living arrangement to the other, from age 18 to 21, their counterparts in legal guardianship can only stay with their legal guardians to remain EFC eligible. This becomes a barrier when the youth or the guardian decides that the youth would no longer stay in the legal guardian's home. Consequently, the youth is left with very limited housing options.

Another recommendation is that further research be conducted to determine what the best time would be in which to introduce foster youth to the prospects of enrolling in post-secondary education. While this study has shown that there are varied factors that influence foster youth to enroll in post-secondary education, a crucial determining factor has been the time in which a decision was made or more likely to be made by foster youth to enroll in college. Many foster youth stated to have made their decision in middle and high school; however, having a better understanding of what time period would be more beneficial to introduce college to foster youth may have a significant impact on future college enrollment among foster youth.

Conclusions

This study explored the perceptions of former and current foster youth, who either graduated from a post-secondary institution, or enrolled in college

or a vocational training, in order to identify the factors that contributed to their post-secondary education enrollment/attainment. Sixteen participants provided information about their personal experience with post-secondary education enrollment via personal interview and self-administered questionnaire. They identified the factors that facilitated their journey to post-secondary education. The majority, who are college students, reported that they enrolled in college because it gave them hope for the future and because it was a personal goal. However, they also reported the influence, motivation, and support of peers, caregivers, mentors, certain high school and college programs, like AVID and EOPS. Of utmost need to them is a hands-on-support which includes assistance with FAFSA Application completion, college application completion, college class registration, preparation for placement tests and college tours which they noted they did not get enough of.

This study's findings are very vital for preparing foster youth for post-secondary education as the study provides needed insights on the necessary services, policy and programs that will help reinforce foster youth's dreams and decision to attain post-secondary education into becoming a promising reality.

APPENDIX A

SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE

Self-Administered Questionnaire

1. Age: _____   2. Gender: ☐ Male, ☐ Female   3. Race:

    _____

4. How old were you when you went into foster care? _____
5. How many years were you in foster care? _____
6. How long have you been in college? _____
7. How many credits have you completed? _____

    Please check all that apply to you and or fill in the blanks.

8. How would you describe your experience in foster care: ☐ good, ☐ bad, ☐

    both, ☐ other: _____

9. Status in school: ☐ full time, ☐ part time, ☐ some classes, ☐ other:

    _____

10. Employment status: ☐ full time, ☐ part time, ☐ working at school, ☐ other:

    _____

11. Current living status: ☐ living alone, ☐ living with partner/spouse, ☐ livings

    with children,

    ☐ with roommates, ☐ other family members, ☐ other: _____

12. Primary form of transportation: ☐ car, ☐ bus, ☐ walk, ☐ other:_____

13. Types of school funding: ☐ loans, ☐ grants, ☐ scholarships, ☐

    other:_____

14. Educational goal: ☐ PhD, ☐ Masters, ☐ Bachelors, ☐ Associates,

    ☐ Certificate, ☐ Other: _____

    Please mark yes or no to the following questions.

Question	YYes	NNo
15. Did you make the decision to enroll in college alone?		
16. Were you in foster care when you enrolled in		

college?		
17. Did you receive support from any social worker (any type) or CFS Educational Liaison to enroll in college?		
18. Did you receive support from any program (ILP, EFC/AB12, etc) to enroll in college?		
19. Did any friendships motivate you to enroll in college?		
20. Did any family members (foster or biological) motivate you to enroll in college?		
21. When you enrolled in college, did you have friends already in college?		
22. When you enrolled in college, did you have family (foster or biological) already in college?		
23. Before you enrolled in college, did you have friends that graduated from college?		
24. Before you enrolled in college, did you have family (foster or biological) that graduated from college?		
25. Did you enroll in college because it was a personal goal?		
26. Did you enroll in college because it was something you wanted to do as a child?		
27. Did you feel that college was something you could accomplish?		
28. Did you enroll in college because it gave you hope for the future?		
29. Did your faith influence you to enroll in college?		

Developed by Stella Anisalone and Manuel Perez

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. When did you decide to go to college?

2. How did you come up with the decision to go to college?

3. What type of support did you have to enroll in college?

4. What would you say influenced you to advance your education past high school?

5. Why was it important for you to enroll in college?

6. What type of student were you in middle/high school?
7. What were your study habits like prior to enrolling in college?
8. What are your study habits like now?
9. On Questions 15 to 29 (from the self-administered questionnaire) that you answered "yes" to, which one would you rate the highest (i.e. most important, most influential)? Which one would you rate the lowest (i.e. least influential)?
10. What else could have been done to help you attend college?
11. Is there any other additional information, feedback or concern that you would like to share?

Developed by Stella Anisalone and Manuel Perez

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

  The study you are about to participate in is designed to explore your perspective on factors that contribute to foster youth post-secondary education enrollment and/or attainment. Post-secondary education is defined as any education obtained past high school diploma or its equivalence. This includes vocational training, junior college, and four-year colleges. This study is being conducted by Stella Anisalone and Manuel Perez, under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Assistant Professor of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has gained the approval of the School of Social Work Institutional Review Board Subcommittee, California State University, San Bernardino.

  During this study, you will be asked to share your opinion on the factors that contribute to foster youth's decision to further their education past high school. All responses gathered from you will be held in utmost confidentiality. Your name will not be reported along with your responses. All collected data will be reported only in group forms. The result of this study will be made available in the Pfau Library's electronic database at California State University, San Bernardino, California.

  You are participating in this program voluntarily. You are free to abstain from answering any question and can withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. The advantages of your participation are that deeper insight will be gained which will help to strengthen the services provided to foster youth to encourage post-secondary education enrollment. Also, existing programs can be enhanced and new programs can be created to facilitate the possibility of foster youth's enrollment into education past high school.

  On completion of this survey/interview, you will be provided with a debriefing statement with more details regarding the study. Your cooperation will assist in improving post-secondary education outcome for foster youth. Again, there is no foreseeable risk to your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to call Dr. Carolyn McAllister at (909) 537-5559.

  By marking below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely give my consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

   Mark: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study you just participated in was designed to explore your personal view point regarding foster youth and post-secondary education. Our interest centers on the factors that contribute to foster youth's decision to further their education past high school. We are mainly looking to see if personal motivation, motivation from friends and service providers, strong relationship with caregivers, and helpful programs, contribute to foster youth's decision to enroll into post-secondary education.

Stella Anisalone and Manuel Perez thank you for taking out the time to participate in this study. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to call Dr. Carolyn McAllister at (909) 537-5559.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout.
However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary
responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed
below.

1. Data Collection:

   Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

   Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

   a. Introduction and Literature

      Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez

   b. Methods

      Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez

   c. Results

      Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez

   d. Discussion

      Team Effort: Stella Anisalone & Manuel Perez