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Factors Leading to Foster Youth Obtaining Higher Education

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FACTORS LEADING TO FOSTER YOUTH OBTAINING HIGHER EDUCATION

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master in Social Work

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by

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Former foster youth face many challenges in obtaining higher education. This research project gathered data through face to face, qualitative interviews with seven former foster youth and two former child welfare workers. The purpose of this study was to identify various contributing factors that the participants identified as positive or negative reasons for obtaining higher education.

This study utilized an interview questionnaire, using open ended questions to gather personal insight and develop a better understanding from the perspectives of the nine participants. Each former foster youth shared their own personal experiences of being in the foster care system. Both former child welfare workers provided personal data, expressing some of the contributing factors leading to former foster youth success in obtaining higher education.

For this study, the researchers utilized 3rd party transcription services to transcribe each individual interview. The researchers coded the data independently and compiled the results of the interviews to identify the various themes that emerged in each interview. The themes that emerged in our data representing positive factors for obtaining higher education consisted of having a mentor or good support network, self-determination, funding, and being informed about the various steps that go into applying, getting into, and succeeding in college. The negative themes that were identified as a contributing factor for not obtaining higher education consisted of multiple placement changes, financial struggles, lack of support, lack of knowledge about college, and lack of confidence in future success.

This study found that former foster youth experienced challenges and difficulties in obtaining higher education. The former child welfare social workers identified strategies in obtaining higher education such as stable schools, a strong support network, positive mentorship, recruitment, and self-determination. Through understanding the factors that play a role in helping or hindering former foster youth in obtaining higher education, we can help contribute to bringing awareness to the issue of better serving foster youth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE FACTORS LEADING TO FOSTER YOUTH OBTAINING

HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to the present research study of the factors leading to foster youth obtaining higher education. There will be an explanation of the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the project for social work practice. As Title IV-E recipients, the current study is significant for enhancing the awareness of the needs of former foster youth and providing information to meeting their needs.

<u>Problem Statement</u>

Receiving a higher education is an accomplishment that many foster youth dreams of achieving. Unfortunately, of those foster youth who hope of earning a degree in higher education, the percentage is extremely low for those who first go on to pursue a college degree. For instance, Whitman mentions that, "Over 80% of foster youth indicate that they want to attend college, however, less than 10% enroll in postsecondary and about 1%–3% of these students graduate with a four-year degree." (Whitman, 2018, p. 82) It is very concerning that the percentage of foster youth who go on to get a four-year degree is staggeringly low, especially when 80% percent of foster youth are vocal about wanting to go to college. Many foster youths aspire for this feat, but they often don't follow through with pursuing a college degree because of the lack of resources, knowledge, or means available to them.

Whitman (2018) highlights that foster youth not only often lack the academic preparation needed for college, but they often also deal with more roadblocks in life that hinder them from thinking college is even a viable option. The specific problem is focused on what factors, both positive and negative, are playing a role in further hindering foster youth from achieving a four-year college degree. Through recognizing and understanding the factors affecting this population, foster youth could achieve more success in higher education and ultimately benefit from the advantages that come with getting a four-year degree. For example, Salazar, (2013) gathered research from a variety of sources that indicate that, "higher education is related to a range of life quality measures that include job success, higher income, better health, lower dependency on welfare programs, lower incarceration rates, and other benefits." (Salazar, 2013, P. 139) These are all opportunities that foster youth need but often rarely encounter because of lack of proper preparation or support for pursuing higher education at a four-year university.

Initially everyone involved with the foster care system should be concerned about the future and well-being of foster youth. It is known that extraordinary benefits come with a college education, and the degree itself allows better access to a wider array of opportunities; opportunities that would otherwise not be available to the foster youth. So, individuals involved with foster youth should be concerned that very few foster youths are going on to get a college degree. In addition, the child welfare system could personally benefit from more research on this adversity through learning about the important factors that are hindering foster youth from pursuing and achieving success in higher education.

One of our main objectives in social work is to protect at risk children and keep them safe. Those involved in child welfare have all made a pledge to social justice, service, and especially, competence. When children come into our custody and care, we must ensure that foster children's needs are met throughout their time in our custody and that we work in a way that is efficient, protecting the future and well-being of those we take from their families. We should also work in a way that does not endanger or jeopardize those in our care. When studies suggest that foster children are more at risk for not advancing educationally in comparison to individuals who were not in foster care, those statistics should cause the social work profession to work harder and operate with a focus for longitudinal success. Data suggests that in comparison to college graduates, those without degrees have more difficulty establishing themselves financially and advancing in their careers (Pew Research Center, 2014; Skobba, Meyers, & Tiller, 2018). Statistics point to low margins of success for those who were inducted into the foster care system and this revelation should cause us to question and examine what we are doing to prevent a harsh future from affecting person's in foster care.

In studying why foster youth do and do not attain higher education, we can develop a preventative model that highlights the risks, addresses the concerns, and identifies the best practices that support foster youth in college attainment. Professionals who work with foster youth should also ensure that their physical and emotional needs are being met. The significance of this study could advance social work practice to further provide supporting tools, assisting in areas affecting underrepresented foster youth. In understanding the relationship between these factors, social workers could implement strategies that lead to early preventative intervention in

the lives of many at risk foster youth. Permanency is more than just meeting physical needs, but also involves promoting educational success, leading into obtaining higher education. Our goal in this research project is to understand the factors (both positive and negative) leading to foster youth obtaining higher education.

In recent years, there has been much data presented and published on the topic of foster youth and higher education attainment. However, there is little information provided from the perspectives of foster youth age 18 and older who did not enroll in higher education. Through including the voice and experiences of foster youth ages 18 and older who did and did not obtain higher education will help in future studies related to the phenomenon. The significance of this study will help identify areas that lead to foster youth achieving higher education from the viewpoint of both foster youth who do advance to higher education, as well as foster youth who do not advance to higher education. In presenting this phenomenon as an area of study, our goal is to gain more insight to fill in the gaps, assisting both social workers in field practice, as well as foster youth affected who may or may not achieve higher education.

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

The purpose of this study is to identify areas that improve the likelihood of foster youth obtaining higher education, as well as identify the risks that could potentially play a role in hindering foster youth from obtaining higher education. The researchers conducted a qualitative study, using convenience and snowball methods, in which we interviewed participants asking them for their viewpoint; including asking what the factors and barriers are leading into higher education. Due to the low percentage of foster youth enrolling into higher education and an even lower percentage graduating,

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the researchers interviewed participants, with an open-ended questionnaire to gain more understanding of the phenomenon. As what was outlined in the problem statement, early intervention and identifying foster youth's needs, can play a vital role in educational success. Key findings identify that very few foster youths enter into college and an even smaller percentage graduate with a college degree. The data presents factors that promote success; however, limited research exists from the perspective of foster youth who do not obtain higher education.

With research conducted to examine the contributing factors of both positive success and negative outcomes, the results of this study will further provide information to aid social workers with better tools to empower their foster youth with preventative services designated to provide foster youth with resources that could lead to future success. In hearing the voice of former foster youth, social workers can better support their needs and check to see if those needs are being met. In identifying foster youth who did not transition into college, this study will aid in providing a clearer understanding to what the inhibiting factors were that did not allow these youth to transition into college, as well as possible determine a needs assessment into ensuring if foster youth were provided adequate information and resources to make such a transition into college.

Further study into the development of contributing factors that lead to positive results of college attainment, as well as considering inhibiting factors, will add more information to aid academic institutions, social workers, and any other professional or care provider working with foster youth. With tools and resources to better support the transition necessary to enroll into higher education, data obtained in this research can

possibly increase the low percentage of foster youth who are enrolled at colleges, as well as help them to maintain enrollment, with the future goal to graduate with their degree.

<u>Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice</u>

The significance of this study is that the findings may serve as supplementary knowledge that sparks new approaches and policies to incorporate efforts of increasing the amount of foster youth who attain a higher education. By directly addressing what may be causing the staggering low percentage of foster youth who receive a degree, social work professionals can better serve to improve the future well-being of their clients. This proposed study is relevant to child welfare because it draws attention to former foster youth and the endeavors and challenges that foster youth are facing upon leaving the system. These findings will also address the barriers foster youth face throughout being in the system that have lasting effects on their lives as they transition into adulthood. Ultimately, the knowledge learned could help serve to create various interventions and lead to increases of resources that could be used to increase the amount of foster youth who pursue and achieve a college degree.

Through understanding both the positive and negative factors impeding on foster youths' higher education, new policies and practices can be administered to target the negative factors that hinder a foster youth from achieving higher education. The information from this study can be extremely beneficial to a variety of levels within the child welfare system such as, micro and macro social workers, foster youth, and policy makers. On the policy level, the findings of this study can serve to influence social workers and social work advocates to introduce best practices and approaches to

preparing foster youth for future academic attainment and success. New policies are needed to focus on targeting some of the negative factors foster youth struggle with like placement stability, lack of support, and financial instability. Knowing that these struggles often play a huge role in the outcome of the foster youths' success in higher education, it is extremely important to address these issues while the foster youth are still in the system. For instance, the findings of this study may be used to incorporate more effective ways foster youth can have the right tools for a good transition from foster care into independence. This can be addressed on a policy level by implementing new educational systems in place for foster youth while they are in the system, and able to access and utilize the resources that help with the process for completing applications, succeeding in the classroom, and graduating.

On a practice level, the research results could be used in order to encourage social workers to incorporate more approaches aimed at confronting some of the barriers that hinder foster youth from pursuing higher education. Finally, the results could be beneficial in providing direction for social workers in preparing foster youth to enroll, participate, and possibly achieve higher education. It can also create clarity in the social work practice for effective techniques that social work professionals can address to pinpoints concerns that hinder foster youth from achieving higher academic success. One main point expressed from the generalist intervention model that will benefit from the results of this research includes the implementation stage. The implementation stage will be most informed from these results because the knowledge of these results allows for improvements to be made. All of these areas can be drastically affected by the results of this research. The research question was presented towards identifying

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what positive and negative factors in a foster youth life play a role in foster youth

attaining higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter outlines necessary resources and interventions for foster youth to obtain higher education. This paper also seeks to understand the barriers that hinder foster youth from obtaining higher education. The subsections of this paper will include Resources that Guide Foster Youth Towards Higher Education Attainment, Barriers that Hinder Foster Youth from Achieving Higher Education. The final subsection will examine Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs as it relates to foster youth stages of growth and social capital theory, which is relevant in discussing what is necessary in social work and foster care practice.

Resources That Guide Foster Youth Towards Higher Education Attainment

Researchers have identified that foster parents have been known to play a vital role in the academic success of the foster youth under their care. Skilbred, Iversen, and Moldestad (2017) explored the positive role that a foster parent can play in helping their foster children achieve academic success. They conducted a qualitative research that interviewed a total of 16 foster parents and 13 foster youth. Their findings discovered that three recurring themes really seemed to serve as a positive resource in helping foster youth achieve success throughout their academic's careers and increasing their interest into higher education. The three major findings included: the foster youth's sense of belonging within their foster homes and schools, their personal values that motivate them to do their best, and the structure and order within the foster home

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(Skilbred, Iversen, & Moldestad,2017). The study found that belongingness was very important for foster youth because many foster youths are being catapulted into new families with little control over the trajectory of their current lives. Foster youth who felt a sense of belonging felt welcomed, loved, and supported by their foster family. Through looking at these qualities in the foster home the researchers were able to identify how impactful the presence of positive foster parents can have on foster youth.

Due to the hardships that foster youth endured throughout their lifetime, many foster youths are known for struggling to maintain healthy relationships with adult figures in their life. However, many foster youths still yearn for that mentorship and adult connection. Part of the foster parents' duties in building a relationship with the foster kids is to create a safe environment for those youth. Having a healthy and comfortable environment where foster youth live can be extremely valuable in the success of their education. Skilbred, Iversen, and Moldestad (2017) implied that, "one of the most fundamental factors foster parents can do is to treat the foster child as their own" (p.362). Treating the foster child as one's own is a great way to help foster youth adapt to the new environment of their foster home. Many of the recipients interviewed who showed success in higher education expressed their gratitude for the constant contact they had with their foster parents even after they left the foster home. Having someone to reach out to for support and guidance is huge for foster youth. The foster kids interviewed expressed that they benefited from the important values and support that their foster parents demonstrated to them. Structure and organization such as allotted time periods for homework and family time also served as a great foundation for preparing a foster youth for higher education.

Researchers discovered four important aspects that can help foster youth in their transition from foster care to adulthood and furthermore even into higher education. These recommendations were collected through focus groups with stakeholders who discovered that recommendations for intervention development, educational advocacy, mentoring, and substance abuse prevention are huge benefits when foster youth are transitioning out of the foster care system. It must be understood that good practices that assist foster youth maintain higher education can be attributed to educational advocacy, mentoring, and (for those who struggle with) alcohol and substance dependency prevention programming (Salazar, Roe, Ullrich, & Haggerty, 2016). Educational advocacy involves utilizing social service agencies to track and monitor the educational progress of foster youth. The service provider is tasked to identify the area of need in any given foster youth and give support to help continue educational progress. These support services include tracking and maintaining active enrollment, an increase in academics, and lowering behavioral issues in foster youth (Pennucci, 2010; Salazar et al., 2016).

Osterling and Hines (2006) discussed the real importance of mentorship in a foster youth's life throughout their transition out of the foster care system. These researchers used mixed methods including quantitative and qualitative research in order to highlight the benefits of mentorship on a foster youth's life and well-being. Their research concluded that mentoring programs for older adolescent foster youth may lead to help prevent negative outcomes when the foster youth emancipates from the foster care system and transitions into adulthood (Osterling, & Hines, 2006). Some of the focal points of their research include discussing the different types of mentorship which

include peer mentoring, group mentoring, one-on-one mentoring, and teams of

mentoring. Mentorships were represented to be a positive factor in the foster youth life,

regardless of the type of mentoring a foster youth was receiving. Mentorship helped the

foster youth through, "providing a supportive and trusting relationship, serving as a role

model, and assisting the youth in acquiring independent living skills" (Osterling, & Hines,

2006, p. 243). A strong support for foster youth is found in mentoring programs. The

goal of mentors is to assist foster youth throughout the various stages of their life. In

having a specific person who is continuous in a foster youth's life is vital to his/her

emotional health and well-being. Some agencies have, as a resource, specialized

mentoring programs that are outlined to provide educational guidance to specifically

support foster youth to obtain higher education (Salazar et al., 2016).

Substance abuse can be a serious issue affecting the lives of many foster youth.

This can be attributed in some ways to a lack of social support networks, dealing with

the effects of experiencing abuse in their care environments, mental health needs, and

dealing with past trauma. Having access to prevention, early intervention, and obtaining

higher education can lead to positive results (Salazar et al., 2016). Many of these issues

stay with many foster youths, even after they age out of the system. Some of these

youths have difficulties dealing with substance dependency. To help foster youth deal

with substance issues, researchers developed supportive programs that help youth and

provide access to resources to ensure that foster youth succeed in higher education.

One such method to assisting college students is by using screening, brief intervention,

referral to treatment (SBIRT). The methods used in the SBIRT approach utilized four

focus groups of 8-10 participants, in which foster youth who participated would be

paired with group leaders who would determine the best prevention to help the participants. The results of the focus groups were that the researchers compared the interviews conducted in the focus group and identified the most common answers provided to determine the best research approach to better develop programs that target the specific needs of foster youth entering into college. The approach uses a checklist to identify the level of risk disclosed by a college student, to provide counseling to assist the college student in decreasing the amount of substances consumed from a daily basis. According to the researchers, this approach has been quite successful in helping youth transition into college as well as reduce the amount of alcohol intake among students during the school week (Salazar et al., 2016).

To help foster youth along the journey, researchers have developed a model which focuses on intervention. Salazar, Haggerty, and Roe (2016) developed a 2-year prevention intervention that guides foster youth from their junior year of high school, into their 1st year of college. The importance of this study is to track students and identify contributing factors to obtaining higher education and success. The process developed to reduce negative patterns and increase positive outcomes for college students is based on a seven-step process. The steps include: 1) Reviewing intervention elements; 2) Focus Groups; 3) Develop initial intervention approach; 4) Youth Theater Testing; 5) Practitioner Feasibility Testing; 6) Finalize Intervention Design; and 7) Effectiveness Testing (Salazar et al., 2016, p. 47). Participants were asked how they individually felt the importance of each component was. Most of the participants felt that each component was necessary in helping them succeed in college. However, "all participants felt that both Independent Living Programs (ILP) and local

colleges/universities would be advantageous settings for a program like Fostering Higher Education (FHE)" (Salazar et al., 2016, p. 53).

<u>Barriers That Hinder Foster Youth Towards Higher Education Attainment</u>

A study conducted by Piel (2018) focused her research on highlighting some of the major factors that impact foster youth from attaining a higher education. Per Piel, some of the major roadblocks for foster youth achieving a college degree include, placement instability, lack of academic preparation, mental health issues, lack of financial support, housing and employment problems, and lack of social and emotional support (piel, 2018) All of these factors play a large role in hindering foster youth from reaching and achieving a four-year degree. The study showed that all these avenues can make it much more difficult for foster youth compared to non-foster youth to achieve a 4-year university degree. The study also found that placement stability is a vital impact factor concerning foster youth achieving higher education because if not it creates instability amongst the foster youth's educational career. The constant moving and changes from school to school can have a negative impact on a child's ability to live up to their full potential in their academics. For example, "foster youth are more likely than their same-age peers to experience enrollment issues due to lost records, repetition of grades, lower test scores, and behavioral issues, which can further complicate their educational progress struggle with placement stability" (Piel, 2018, p. 22). Many times, it's not because the child is not potentially able to achieve such greatness, but it is often because of the way that their system fails to meet the needs of these vulnerable children that automatically place foster youth at a disadvantage. We cannot expect foster youth to excel in higher education if they are not guided with the proper resources

concerning what it realistically takes to achieve success in higher education, given their circumstances and their history.

Some of the other factors such as lack of financial, social, and emotional support for foster youth also play a huge impact on the outcome of the trajectory of a foster youth's future. Piel (2018) further explains that usually what plays a part in academic success is when students are able to make social connections with supportive adults such as teachers, mentors, and other educators. However, because of the plethora of uncertainties and mistrust that foster youth experience with adult figures it becomes difficult to create, maintain, and receive healthy connections.

In considering obtaining higher education, research has documented that individuals who were at one time in foster care have greater disadvantages educationally and have difficult outcomes when compared to peers in the population (Unrau, Dawson, Hamilton, & Bennett, 2017). In examining the various barriers and difficulties ascribed to foster youth, research has identified areas related to poor academic preparedness that is due to frequent changes among different schools (Courtney et al.; 2004; Pecora et al., 2005; Unrau et al., 2017). Stating that foster youth that have experienced frequent placement changes "lose four to six months of academic progress every time there is a switch in schools" (McKellar & Cowan; 2011; Unrau et al., 2017, p. 65). These major disruptions can have the effect of putting foster youth at a disadvantage academically and have the possible outcome of having these youth not be at their grade level, leaving them to be placed in classrooms that are not preparing them for their academic future.

Other issues related to obtaining higher education are due to statistics which point to several foster youths who are enrolled in special education, then compared to peers in the general population (Unrau et al., 2017). This can have a dramatic effect for foster youth who age out of the system and are not at their grade level when leaving the homes in which they lived; especially, in competing for top paying jobs or deciding to attend college. With these statistics, some research has attributed low test scores among foster youth who then do not proceed to earn a high school diploma, attend college, or receive a college degree (Unrau et al., 2017).

Other contributing factors affecting successful outcomes in obtaining higher education for foster youth, are found having financial needs, which amounts to not having the resources to meet their basic needs (housing, food, transportation). Permanent housing relates to not being able to rent a home or live with someone. There is also a need for further social and emotional support, to help foster youth who are experiencing any difficulties transitioning into higher education. Some foster youth are unable to seek higher education due to needing full-time employment, and the lack of adequate transportation affects the ability to juggle multiple responsibilities (Dworsky and Perez, 2010; Unrau et al., 2017). There is also research that identifies needing stronger life skills, access to mental health resources, and dealing with behavioral concerns, which can affect obtaining higher education (Keller, Salazar, & Courtney, 2010; McMillen et al., 2005; Unrau et al., 2017). Other research examining deterrents to obtaining higher education found that "by the age of 18, about two-thirds of young people from foster care do not have basic resources such as a driver's license or money for necessities" (Pecora et al., 2006; Unrau et al., 2017, p. 65).

Foster youths' basic needs should first be properly met before they can focus on undertakings like achieving success in higher education. Some of the common basic needs within a human's life include sufficient housing, food, and health care for that individual. When foster youths' basic needs are not met it makes it extremely difficult for those individuals to escape the survival mindset that many foster youths commonly find themselves in. Someone in a survival mindset is unable to focus on normal life tasks and duties such as education because they are more preoccupied with first meeting their basic survival needs. Foster youth transitioning into higher education usually are at a disadvantage in terms of resources and support available to them like housing and finances. Peil (2018) highlights that the transition for foster youth into higher education normally requires a change of housing and since many foster youths don't have that means they usually end up homeless. It becomes evident that foster youth have such a low success in higher education because many foster youths who age out of the system are primarily concerned about where their next meal is going to come from or where they are going to sleep that night.

In order to properly assess the factors hindering foster youth from attaining a higher education, a child welfare worker can apply Maslow's theory in order to identify if the foster youth is prepared to work towards bettering oneself with opportunities like higher education. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, the idea is believed that in order to reach one's full self-realization all of their other needs must be met first. "Maslow's subsequent pyramid-shape hierarchy of needs captured the world's imagination by suggesting that humans are driven by innate needs for survival, safety,

love and belonging, esteem, and self-realization, in that order, (Abulof, 2017, pg. 805).

Maslow's theory is considered to be a prerequisite in which it is required to first take

care of their basic needs such as survival prior to being able to accomplish some of the

more beneficial needs such as love and self-actualization. Therefore, if the basic needs

of foster youth are not being met, we cannot expect them to mentally, physically, or

academically be prepared to focus on other things such as higher education.

From what research has gathered, social capital theory also helps to understand

the experience of foster youth who want to achieve educational success in higher

education. This involves understanding that in healthy human relationships are pivotal

to the growth, development, and the well-being of our society. However, foster youth are

at a greater risk of not having their basic needs met, requiring other systems to provide

resources for better outcomes. Regarding social capital theory, two main components of

this theory focus on social networks and resources (Coleman, 1988; Hauberer, 2011;

Putnam, 2000; Skobba, Meyers, and Tiller, 2018). Having direct access to people,

information, and resources aid foster youth in attaining higher education. However,

there is a growing population of foster youth who are unable to transition into higher

education.

Social capital in foster youth refers to "personal relationships or connections to

social networks" (Caspi et al., 1998; Hook, and Courtney, 2011). Depending on how

foster youth were established in their systems of care, social capital can be a predictor

as to what resources they get connected with. Having access to various forms of

resources can provide stability, economic gain, and access to college attendance.

Research has found that when foster youth have close relationships with many different

familial sources; including biological parents, foster or adoptive parents, teachers, mentors, or child welfare workers; foster youth can attain higher education (Hunter, Monroe, & Garand, 2014). Unfortunately, many foster youth face disadvantages due to not having access to networks or resources in the form of social capital. This is due to not having close relationships with family members and a lack of mentors (Marcus, 1991; Hunter et al., 2014). In addition, some face hardships in lacking educational support (Hunter et al., 2014). Some studies suggest that a lack of educational support is due to foster parents focusing primarily on behavior, instead of developing a strong educational base (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004; Hunter et al., 2014).

Another deterrent affecting foster youth is due to frequent placement changes that disrupt school connections (Hunter et al., 2014). Studies suggest that multiple, frequent changes to school and family settings affects foster youth's ability to develop strong connections. Not having strong connections makes it difficult to develop close relationships with teachers, mentors, and other networks and resources that can provide foster youth with the support to obtain higher education (Hunter et al., 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify factors leading to higher education attainment among foster youth. Subsequently, this paper will also identify key reasons as to why foster youth do not obtain higher education. The importance of higher education can provide for future stability and economic support in foster youth, as they transition into independent living. However, there are many challenges that play a role in determining specific outcomes for foster youth. Many of these challenges can explain

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the reason why some foster youth do not attain higher education. As discussed, some of the theoretical factors can be in support of Maslow's theory and social capital. With early detection and prevention measures, foster youth can thrive and transition into higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will cover the research methods that will be used for this study. This will include emphasizing the study's design, sampling methods, data collection and interview instrument, procedures, protection of human subjects, qualitative data analysis, and summary.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to examine factors leading to foster youth obtaining higher education. This study used a qualitative design for collecting data, including face-to-face interviews with seven former foster youth, and two social workers who have retired from the practice of child welfare. Both of the former child welfare social workers currently work in higher education and one of the former social workers is now an educational liaison. This study consisted of open-ended questions, from the point of view of the participants to identify the causes of foster youth obtaining higher education, the resources that guide foster youth to higher education, and the barriers that prevent foster youth from obtaining higher education. By including the voices of diverse perspectives from former foster youth, and former social workers; we can better capture the unique circumstances from all parties as to why foster youth are achieving higher education and why some foster youth are not achieving higher education.

The strengths of this particular design allow the researchers to gain more knowledge and a deeper understanding from the perspectives of former foster youth.

This design consists of foster youth who are enrolled in higher education in order to get feedback of the contributing factors they believe assisted them in their enrollment in higher education, as well as includes the perspective of former foster youth who are not enrolled in higher education to gain a better understanding as to why they are not enrolled in higher education. The strengths of including former child welfare social workers, allows an opportunity for deeper insight as to why former foster youth do and do not enroll in higher education. The strengths of including an educational liaison who currently works in higher education in this study is to give more depth and insight into the challenges facing foster youth in obtaining higher education. The major strengths of including all parties is to gather insight from the professional's viewpoint and the foster youth's viewpoint, to better emphasize the importance of foster youth obtaining higher education.

The limitations of the design are that the researchers have a small sample size of a few participants. This sample size is not representative of all foster youth that may or may not be experiencing these same issues, making it difficult to address all the barriers that foster youth may face in their journey to obtaining higher education. Some of these limitations of potential barriers include mental health concerns, homelessness, lack of support network, lack of financial stability, and in some situations the fact that the foster youth did not want to disclose any barriers that they are currently or had previously experienced. All the information gained may only apply to specific situations and may not answer some of the difficult questions associated with foster youth obtaining higher education, requiring further research into the phenomenon.

Sampling

This study used convenience and snowball sampling, in which the researchers connected with 4 former foster youth (18 years or older), that we know personally, who are currently enrolled in higher education or graduated with their degree, and 3 former foster youth (18 years or older), who we also know currently, who are college age and not currently enrolled in higher education. The researchers also interviewed two former child welfare social workers who are now working in higher education, and specifically includes one educational liaison. Sampling criteria, for the purpose of this study, includes former foster youth who are age 18 years of age or older and who have been involved in the foster care system for one year or longer. This study also utilized snowball sampling to help identify a few more of the former foster youth participants from each category, representative to this study.

For this study to be diverse and representative of the population, the researchers attempted to interview both male and female former foster youth from each category. The researcher attempted to interview a representative sample of various ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. This was to ensure that participants have had experiences in matters of higher education and are able to answer questions related to the study.

Data Collection and Instruments

For this study, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with 7 former foster youth using an interview guide comprised of 21 questions (Appendix A). This guide includes the demographic information on all the interviewees, consisting of 9 questions. In questions relating to former foster youth, the demographic information includes the following: age, marital status, ethnicity, gender, highest level of school completed, if they are currently enrolled in college, their current employment status, and

how many years they were involved with the child welfare system. This guide also includes 12 primary open-ended questions regarding the barriers and factors that these foster youth have experienced which played a role in helping or hindering them from achieving higher education.

The primary questions are geared towards gathering information that solicits personal experiences that can explain factors that led to enrolling into higher education and barriers that led to not enrolling into higher education from all participants. Some sample questions include the following: did you experience any placement changes throughout your time in foster care, what were some of the steps that you took to enroll into higher education, in foster care did you experience any barriers in the process of enrolling in higher education, and did college seem like a realistic goal for you growing up. All participants were asked to describe in their own views and opinions, what are the main causes that enabled them to enroll or not enroll into higher education.

For this study, the researchers also conducted face-to-face interviews with two former child welfare social workers using an interview guide comprised of 10 questions (Appendix B). Presently, one is working in higher education and the other is an educational liaison. For questions relating to former child welfare social workers and the educational liaison, the demographic information includes the following: what their current age is, how many years did they work in the child welfare system, what is their ethnicity, and what is the highest degree or level of school they have completed. The open-ended questions for the social workers and education liaison were asked in relation to the years of service working with foster youth, the significance of the work that was done in helping former foster youth, and any barriers or challenges in helping

this group of individuals succeed in higher education. The interview questions were open-ended, with the interviewee's encouraged to share additional details that will provide clear insight into their experience. Other questions included: what would they suggest for ways to improve foster youth to go to college, what skills and knowledge do they feel is necessary to help foster youth go to college, and in their opinion what is being done for foster youth who are wanting to attain a higher education. We also asked the educational liaison, what is the role that they played in assisting foster youth academically.

Procedures

For this study, the researchers recruited former foster youth, former child welfare social workers, and an education liaison in San Bernardino, CA. This was accomplished through reaching out and contacting the foster youth, social workers, and education liaison that we know personally; the rest of the participants were referred by other individuals. The individuals were interviewed during daylight hours (8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.), Monday through Saturday, from the month of January 2020 until April 2020. Many of the interviews were scheduled and held at California State University, San Bernardino. Interviews also took place at local public facilities that do not require initial approval to host, within the city of San Bernardino. Prior to the interviews, participants were selected and notified via email or phone. Participants of this study were provided with an informed consent and were also informed that this procedure is purely voluntary. Each participant was thoroughly informed of the nature of this study, in which the researchers are doing a study to identify from personal experience any factors that led to enrolling or not enrolling into higher education, as well as asked for feedback that

would help someone better understand the phenomenon. Each individual interview lasted roughly 20-30 minutes to complete and was administered by the researchers.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers secured necessary measures to ensure the protection of the identities, questions provided, and any results found through this study. The researchers safeguarded all information provided by the participants throughout the entirety of this study. In efforts to maintain participants' information confidential, the researchers provided the interviewees with informed consent, audio consent form, and chose a location that was private and away from other individuals. All participants were informed that their addition to this research was strictly voluntary and if at any time for any reason they felt the need to withdraw, they were encouraged to do so. After the participants were informed about consent and that their presence in this research is voluntary, then they were asked to sign an X on both the informed consent form and audio tape consent form. Furthermore, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that it is being conducted with IRB approval. The researchers also provided the participants with a little bit of history of who the researchers are and why this research is needed.

The researchers did not use the real names of the interviewees in the protection of guaranteeing the participants confidentiality, and in addition, each participant was assigned a color in order to protect their anonymity. Knowing that some of the research questions can trigger old memories and traumas for the individuals, participants were informed that they are not obligated to answer every question if for any reason they chose not to. To further provide protection to the participants, the researchers have

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been storing and filing the information obtained through the separate interviews under lock and key and all digital records will be stored on the CSUSB email, which is an encryption service provided to California State University, San Bernardino students. In the termination of the study, the researchers will shred physical documents, and delete digital files that were collected throughout the study. This will be carried out prior to the end of the year of 2023.

Data Analysis

This study used a qualitative approach through conducting multiple interview sessions. After the completion of the interviews, the data was collected through separate audio recordings and were transcribed using a secured approved transcription agency. The interviews were transcribed word for word, allowing for easier identification of the themes and patterns that correlate between the participants. The digital recordings from the interviews were transcribed exactly as stated and uploaded to the transcription agency. A coding method was applied to highlight the similarities and differences that existed between both the interviewees who are foster youth in college compared to the foster youth who are not in college. The researchers searched for additional mutual themes, perspectives, and emotions between each participant in order to highlight the findings within the research.

The qualitative approach allowed for the researchers to get more personal insight into what factors can catapult a foster youth into achieving higher education. The data analyzed throughout this research was based on the individual experiences of the foster youth, the child welfare social workers, and the educational liaison. This study used

descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variability in order to describe the findings of the sample.

Summary

In summary, this chapter identified many methodological instruments that are utilized throughout this study. This section includes the study design, sampling, data collection & instrument, procedures, data analysis, and protection of human subjects. The research was conducted with a qualitative design and used convenience and snowball sampling. Most interviews were conducted in person in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Face to face interviews allowed the researchers to address certain issues that could have arisen throughout the interview process. All these instruments are used to help identify the factors that lead or hindered a foster youth from achieving higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined foster youths' experiences and opinions on what factors help or hinder foster youth from achieving a higher education. This study also examined two former social workers who now work in higher education as to what they believe are the contributing factors that help or hinder foster youth from attaining a higher education. This chapter specifies the data collection that was collected from interviews with eight former foster youth (Appendix A) and two former social workers (Appendix B). Foremost, we described our participants through various demographic questions. Then, we describe the ideas, themes, and similarities that surfaced from the analysis of our data.

<u>Demographics</u>

The Appendix A portion of this data collection includes five (71.4%) female former foster youth, and two (28.5%) male former foster youth. The time frame that each of these individuals were in the foster care system ranges from one year to nineteen years with a mean of 9.3 years. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 26 with a mean age of 24.14. Three of our participants identified as African American (42.8%), three as Caucasian (42.8%), and one as Hispanic (14.3%). Out of the seven former foster youth, three (42.8%) have dropped out of college and never achieved a degree, two (28.5%) have completed their bachelor's degree, and two (28.5%) are currently still enrolled in higher education.

The Appendix B portion of this data collection includes one male former child welfare social (50%) and one female former child welfare social worker (50%). The male social worker works in higher education, and the female social worker is an educational liaison. One of the participants identified as African American, and the other identified as Caucasian. The time frame that each of these individuals worked in the child welfare field ranged from 17 years, and 19.5 years, with a mean of 18.25 years. Both social workers have completed their master's degree.

<u>Presentation of Findings</u>

The themes that we discovered from analyzing the data and identifying the factors that played a role in helping a former foster youth go to college and excel throughout the pursuit of higher education generated valuable findings. Some of the positive factors included

- Having a mentor

- A good support networks

- Having people who pushed these individuals to strive for higher education

- Having help with the application process for college and applying for various resources

- Wanting to break the negative generational cycles that these foster youth have lived through relating to self-determination

- Being informed about various steps and resources that go into applying, getting into, and succeeding in college

- Funding -- many of the participants reported that their options for higher education depended on the affordability of the school they were applying to.

Other positive markers that reinforced the pursuit of higher education came in the form of features that varied from foster youth to foster youth. These were considered outliers due to not generally being applied to all former foster youths. These included caregivers that instituted educational activities in the home in the form of reading, writing, limited use of television, and various extracurricular activities including sports, and volunteering. Some of the outliers were given as punishment to some of the foster youth who participated in this research project and other participants were given these activities to instill a sense of direction.

This research project also fixated on an understanding of the negative factors that resulted in former foster youth not going to college, struggling with adapting to college, or eventually dropping out of college. Some of the negative factors included

- Multiple placement changes

- Multiple school changes

- Financial struggles

- Lack of support

- Lack of knowledge on resources available to foster youth

- Lack of placement stability

- Lack of confidence in future success and various self-defeating thoughts.

The research further identified various outliers from former foster youth that identified areas related to struggling with mental health, missing units or school credits,

and having to repeat grade levels that were previously completed. Additionally, the former foster youth each identified why they believe the statistic for foster youth achieving a higher education is so low. Their responses varied from different experiences that foster youth go through, how they react to those experiences, and various situational factors that may affect their lives. For example, Ms. Red shared that a situational factor that played a role in her dropping out of school was her having to deal with the death of five loved ones in her first year in college.

In interviewing the two former child welfare workers, what was reported correlated with many of the themes suggested by the former foster youth. In identifying positive factors that lead to higher education, the former child welfare workers emphasized

- Having all the necessary school credits to graduate

- A strong support system

- Positive mentorship

- Advocacy

- Knowledge of available grants, resources, and programs

- Recruitment

- Guidance

- Self-determination

- Stable schools

The two former child welfare workers also identified for former foster youth to be successful in areas of basic finance, budgeting, life skills, and adaptability. The two former child welfare workers identified that there are various programs available to help

foster youth to be successful and have financial support while in higher education. The programs that were identified were

- Give Something Back, which provides scholarships and mentorship for former foster youth who meet their criteria

- The Chafee grant which aids former foster youth who attend higher education

- Rising Stars

- Guardians Scholar Program

- The Educational Opportunity Program

- Court-Appointed Special Advocate mentorship program

- Extended Foster Care

- Independent Living Program for foster youth

- The Pell Grant

- the Children's Fund

The former child welfare workers identified that these programs and many others, are designed to aid former foster youth with resources to achieve higher education and become successful in life.

The former child welfare workers also identified negative factors that lead to foster youth not obtaining higher education and even reasons why some drop out of school. What was identified by the two showed that many child welfare workers are overwhelmed by cases and do not have the time to inform each foster youth who is age 14 and older about higher education options. This includes not informing foster youth of funding that is available for them to go to college and housing possibilities by staying as

a foster youth after age 18 and receiving housing resources that could be applied to living on campus. The former child welfare workers also explained that the pairing of suitable mentors to assist former foster youth needs to be tailored to the foster youths' specific needs.

One of the most important statements made by the former child welfare workers, is the importance of encouraging former foster youth by letting them know that you believe in them and that they can accomplish anything they put their minds to doing. It was reported that many foster youths lack positive support systems and many of these individuals feel discouraged and have much self-doubt. The former child welfare workers said that it only takes a few minutes to help a foster youth with getting connected with colleges that have programs that are available to foster youth.

Positive Factors Helping Foster Youth Achieve a Higher Education

The former foster youth reported three main positive factors that helped them strive for higher education.

1. The former foster youth reported the benefits of having good mentors, family, friends, and individuals who supported and pushed them to excel in life.

2. The former foster youth highlighted the benefits of having someone to guide and help them with the application process for college and applying for various resources that would benefit them throughout their higher education. Knowing individuals who could inform these foster youth about the various steps and resources that go into applying, getting into, and

succeeding in college played a significant role in these youth journeys towards higher education.

3. Many of the foster youth expressed self-determination and the desire of wanting to break the negative generational cycles that they have been through as the driving force of their pursuit of higher education.

Challenges Affecting Foster Youth From Attaining Higher Education

The former foster youth reported four main challenges throughout their adolescent years that played a significant role in not adequately setting them up on the right path for college.

1. The former foster youth reported that many of them moved from placement to placement, location to location, and school to school.

2. Many of the former foster youth reported not having a good support network or group of individuals that they could count on.

3. Many of the former foster youth highlighted that the lack of finances was a huge hindrance in their childhood, when they were applying for college, and even when they were in college.

4. The former foster youth reported that the lack of not knowing someone personally who went to college, the requirements and steps it takes to get into college, and the general lack of knowledge about college which played a negative role in them seeking higher education.

Mentorship and Support Network

When asked if at least one person in the foster youth's life played a significant role in helping them believe they could achieve higher education, all the

foster youth implied yes. They expressed that these people who made them believe they could achieve higher education came in the form of friends, parents, grandparents, foster parents, teachers, counselors, and significant others. Many of the foster youth shared stories of how their support network of friends, family, mentors, and leaders in their life helped uplift and motivate these individuals in some of their darkest times.

Ms. Orange stated, "My cousins always just pushed us to strive to try to be the best we can be, which is why they tried to put us in the best schools while we were placed with them."

Another foster youth explained, "I feel like I've always had really supportive people around me for most of my life. Mostly my family, and then people at church pushing me to do better, and distant family keeping in touch with me. My mom just always pushed us to try and do better than she did" (Mr. Green). Additionally, another foster youth reported that a mentor she kept in touch with from a foster youth camp she attended as a child ended up playing one of the biggest roles in helping her academically, physically, and mentally. This foster youth stated, "as I started going through transitions, and as I started thinking about the idea of school and everything like that, she was a person that did help me and push me to never stop going to school and not to be another negative statistic. Once I aged out the system, I became closer with her. She's like a mom to me" (Ms. Purple).

Unfortunately, not all members reported having positive support networks and mentors in their life. Negative support networks can hinder these foster youth from achieving their full potential. For instance, Ms. Red mentioned that "She was labeled as not going to amount to nothing. It's kind of messed with my head. By everybody saying

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that I'm not good enough, it made me feel like I'm not good enough." Additionally, the former social worker Mr. Black emphasized the importance of mentorship and support of former foster youth by saying, "each one reach one, each one teach one." Mr. Black feels a personal sense of responsibility in helping former foster youth in a personal way. The former social worker Ms. Brown emphasized encouragement with foster youth by saying, "You can do it. You're good enough to go to college."

<u>Self Determination</u>

An important finding was that most of the participants felt that their own self determination of wanting to be better and break the generational cycle in their life, was what helped them on the journey towards higher education. Ms. Purple stated that "I used to see my family struggle. I felt like, for me, education was important because it meant that I could get out of that." Ms. Orange stated that "I think I just always tried really, really hard to get better grades, to do better just so that I can create a more positive life for myself." When asked why Mr. Green believes such a low percentage of foster youth go to college. Mr. Green stated that "I think it's just a drive thing. It's like, for me, I know what that's like, so I don't want my kids to have to ever end up in foster care, so I want to make sure that I can provide for them always and not get into any trouble. For some people, they do not think that. Sometimes they go the opposite route, which is not caring about education." Lastly, Ms. Blue implied that "I knew that in order to better my life and not end up like my parents, that I would have to go on to get a higher education."

<u>Effects of Placement Changes on Foster Youths Education</u>

Many of the former foster youth expressed that placement changes left them scrambling to play catch up in school, and repeating classes and grade levels. Placement changes also demonstrated to make it hard for these youth to make new friends, to find a stable comfortable place for them to adapt to, and to be in a clear head space to perform their best academically.

All seven of the foster youth reported going through multiple placements throughout their childhood. The placement changes for each foster youth ranged from a minimum of three placement changes all the way up to sixteen total placement changes. Ms. red stated that "Yes, placement changes did affect her academic growth because she was in 16 different foster homes. She was always moved from school to school. She was in two different elementary schools, two different middle schools and three different high schools." Ms. Orange stated that "being a freshman is already scary enough. Then being switched around at three different schools, not really knowing anybody or having any friends, it was really tough."

<u>Financial Stability</u>

More than half of the foster youth we interviewed reported experiencing some type of financial burden when planning for college. Some of the participants explained that they did not know how they were going to support themselves after exiting the foster care system, let alone how they would afford college. Mr. Silver specified that "Yeah, money was a huge stressor. I did not know how I was going to pay for college. Money was a huge stressor for me starting even before college, even through college. It's always been a stressor, but hopefully, this will all pay off." Furthermore, Ms. teal shared a story about how she could not afford to pay for a class

she dropped and because of it she had to drop out of college. Ms. Teal specified that "I dropped a class, and now I owe money, I want to go back to school, but I just don't have $2,000 to pay them. So now it is either getting that money or working, and then even when you get that money it's like now you got to survive and use it for other things." Ms. Teal is just one of many foster youths who are affected by financial burdens which affect these foster youth from going to college and staying in college once they are enrolled. Lastly, Ms. Purple expressed "I feel like one of the biggest barriers is just making the decision between having money and a roof over your head, and then wanting to go to school."

<u>Access to College Resources and Knowledge About Applying to College</u>

Many of the foster youth expressed that they did not have prime examples of people around them who went to college. Some of the participants explained that outside of doing the research about college themselves, they are extremely grateful for the individuals who helped them learn about college. Other foster youth reported that they missed out on various resources that could provide extra support, financial help, and resources to foster youth while they are in college because they were unaware of the services available to them. An interesting theme that emerged was that many of these former foster youth expressed without the mentors, leaders, and various people in their lives teaching them knowledge about applying to college, they probably wouldn't have made it to higher education.

Ms. Purple stated that, "In the beginning, I was worried because I didn't know about the BOG Waiver. I didn't know about FAFSA. I did not know about anything. I think that's why I didn't think it was possible to go to college. Once I was more informed

and everything like that, then I felt like it was possible." Mr. Silver explained, "in high school, I got to be part of a program called CREW. They introduced us to how to apply for scholarships and the basics of financial aid and FAFSA, how to reach out to schools and the admission process." Ms. Blue shared that, "I had the Independent Living Programs help. I got a few scholarships to where I won a laptop. Then Cal State San Bernardino has the EOP program, and I got assistance with them. They're actually the reason why I am actually at the university."

Summary

This chapter covers how the data was analyzed, the demographics of the participants, and the key findings that were discovered in our interviews. The interpretations of the findings were discussed and evaluated to discover what factors help and hinder foster youth in their pursuit towards higher education. The findings explained that mentorship, finances, support networks, placement changes, knowledge on college and the applying process, self-determination, and various situational factors all play a role in helping or hindering various foster youth from pursuing higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this section we will be discussing the research question, findings, literature review, the limitations of this study, and what the implications this study will have for former foster youth who are seeking higher education.

Discussion

The research question of this study: understanding the positive and negative factors leading to foster youth obtaining higher education. This study has shown that many former foster youths faced many challenges to get to a place of obtaining higher education, more challenges due to circumstances that are beyond their control. This study has also shown that positive contributing factors include financial support, mentorship, accessibility to programs, self-determination, and emotional support. The negative contributing factors include multiple placements, relocating schools, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, lack of mentorship, and self-defeat due to not having a support system to offer encouragement. The former child welfare workers attributed the positive contributing factors for former foster youth success to access to programs, mentorship, grants and scholarships, social worker involvement, and self-determination. The former child welfare workers attributed the negative contributing factors of former foster youth success to multiple placements, relocating schools, lack of mentorship, and lack of information provided to foster youth.

This study included nine participants, with two out of the nine representing the social work profession. Most of the participants highlighted programs, services, grants and scholarships that help former foster youth obtain higher education, there is still much more that can be done to better connect former foster youth with knowledge of programs available to them, more financial services to meet their needs, more supportive services of mentorship and other live skills to better navigate the transition from foster care to higher education, and emergency services if the former foster youth faces a crisis that could potentially lead to the individual to drop out of college. The results of this research project contained a sample size of 9, which does not capture the phenomenon on a larger scale. This research also focused on one county, which does not fully represent the amount of former foster youth and their specific experiences in higher education. Future research into the positive and negative factors of foster youth obtaining higher education, conducted in other counties with a larger number of participants can add more depth to understanding this phenomenon.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was due to a small sample size. The sample size did not allow for deeper development of possible positive and negative factors leading to higher education; there needs to be more research into this study. Another limitation of this study was participation; there needed to be more balance to interviewees taken from those who did enroll into higher education and those who did not enroll into higher education. Future research into this phenomenon with a larger sample size and a balanced comparison of those in higher education versus those not enrolled into higher education can enhance this study. Another limitation is asking questions from varying

levels of interest into better knowing some of the potential factors leading those to enroll or not enroll into higher education.

Implications

This study can be used to help former foster youth gain knowledge of resources available to aid them in pursuing higher education. This study can also inform former foster youth with an understanding of possible factors affecting the ability to enroll into higher education. This study can help social work professionals with an understanding of what information needs to be disseminated to former foster youth to obtain higher education and the necessary mentorship and resources necessary to maintain higher education. This research can also be expanded to other areas affecting foster youth from obtaining higher education.

Conclusions

This study provided information on positive and negative factors that former foster youth experience to obtain higher education. This study also included opinions from former child welfare workers as to positive and negative factors affecting former foster youth from obtaining higher education. In participating in this research project, the researchers were able to collect views, experiences, and opinions as to what can be done to help former foster youth. The results of this study corresponded with the literature and theories and emphasized the importance of connecting with foster youth to aid them in their endeavor to obtain higher education.

APPENDIX A

Former Foster Youth Interview Guide

Demographics questions
Pre screening: All foster youth must be in foster care for at least one year.

What is your current Age: _____

What is your marital status?
      A.   Single (never Married)
      B.   Married
      C.   Divorced
      D.   Widowed
      E.   Other (please specify)

Ethnicity:

      1.   Black
      2.   White
      3.   Hispanic/Latino
      4.   Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino
      5.   Other

What is you gender?
      1.   Male
      2.   Female
      3.   Other
      4.   Prefer not to say

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
      A.   Less than a high school diploma
      B.   High school degree or equivalent
      C.   Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
      D.   Master's degree
      E.   Doctorate
      F.   Other (Please specify)

Are you currently enrolled in college?
      1.   Yes
      2.   No
      3.   I Finished college already

What is your current employment status?
    A. Employed Full-Time
    B. Employed Part-Time
    C. Seeking opportunities
    D. Retired

E. Prefer not to say

How many years were you in the foster care system?
_____

Interview questions

    1.   Did you experience any placement changes throughout your time in foster care?
If you did move from more than one placement can you explain if this affected your academics growing up? If so, please explain.

    2.   Did you have any barriers that prevented you from enrolling into higher education? If so, please explain.

    3.   Were there any positive factors throughout your journey in foster care that prepared you for higher education? If so, please explain.

    4. Were there any negative factors throughout your journey in foster care that disadvantaged you from pursuing higher education? If so, please explain.

    4.   Did your foster parents play a role in helping you academically while growing up? If so, please explain.

    5.   Did your foster parents play any role in introducing the possibility of higher education to you? If so, please explain

    6.   Describe in your own views and opinions what is the main causes that enabled you to enroll or not enroll into higher education.

    7.   What were some of the steps that you took to enroll into higher education?

    8.   Did college seem like a realistic goal for you growing up? Why or why not.

    9. Has lack of money played a factor in your pursuit of higher education? If so, please explain.

    10. In your transition from foster care to adulthood, what were your main concerns, priorities, and goals at that time in your life?

    11. Was there at least one person in your life that played a significant role in helping you believe that you can achieve higher education. If so, please explain.

APPENDIX B

Former Child Welfare Workers Interview Guide

(Interview guide for social workers and educational liaison)
Demographics

What is your current Age: _____

How many years did you work in the child welfare field? _____

Ethnicity:

1. Black
2. White
3. Hispanic/Latino
4. Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino
5. Other (Please specify)

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
A. Less than a high school diploma
B. High school degree or equivalent
C. Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)
D. Master's degree
E. Doctorate
F. Other (Please specify)

Interview Questions
1. In your opinion what are some of the barriers that foster youth face that hinder them from pursuing higher education?
2. In your opinion what is being done for foster youth who are wanting to attain a higher education?
3. What would you suggest for ways to improve foster youth to go to college?
4. How are you a positive individual that helps facilitate foster youth to seek higher education?
5. What skills and knowledge do you feel is necessary to help foster youth go to college?
6. What are the necessities for helping foster youth transition into college and succeed throughout their higher education?

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

The study you are asked to participate in is designed to examine the experiences of former foster youth and their involvement in foster care. The study is being conducted by Keyln Leeker and Stephen Burwell, who are both MSW students at California State University, San Bernardino. This study will be completed under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Shon, who is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work, at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the factors that lead and hinder foster youth from achieving higher education.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be individually interviewed at a time and place that is most convenient for them. Interviews will be scheduled in advance at a private location of the participants choosing to protect confidentiality. These interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and compared and contrasted to the other participants in the study. The participants will be asked questions centered around their experiences in foster care and how those experiences either hindered or helped them in achieving higher education.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely choose to discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

ANONYMOUS: All of the data collected and recorded will be kept anonymous. No identifying information will be kept regarding the participants. Instead, each participant will be represented by a number in order to keep their names confidential. The audio recordings, transcribed interviews, and analysis will all be secured and kept safe on password protected drive. Any information used from the participants interviews will not contain any identifying information about the individual. After completion of the study, all of the audio files and any identifying information will be deleted and destroyed.

DURATION: The interviews will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risk to the participants involved in this study. However, some of the questions may spark an emotional response in the participants. If the questions touch on a sensitive topic for the participants, they may refuse to answer the questions or end the interview at any time.

BENEFITS: Upon approval of this research project by the SSI Graduate Student Culminating Project Fund. Each participant will be given a $15.00 gift card for their participation to be issued and used at any Walmart. However, if the grant application is rejected, there will not be any direct benefits to the individuals participating in this study.

AUDIO RECORDINGS: I understand that this research will be audio recorded and my responses will be utilized in this research study Yes □ No □.

CONTACT: If you have questions about the research or your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Herbert Shon, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, at (909) 537-5532 or **herb.shon@csusb.edu**

RESULTS: After the completion of this study, the results can be located in the CSUSB Library website Pfau Library Scholar works (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/)

SIGNATURE: I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.
Please place an (X) below if you agree to the conditions of the study and volunteer to participate.

_____ Date: _____

    Place an X mark here

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This research project was completed as a collaboration between two partners: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker. The research study and paper portions were shared equally, with each researcher completing half of their sections of each chapter. The following sections were completed as follows:

1. Data Collection and Data Analysis: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

2. Written Report and Presentation of Findings

    a. Abstract: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    b. Acknowledgments: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    c. Chapter One. Introduction: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    d. Chapter Two. Literature Review: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    e. Chapter Three. Methods: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    f.   Chapter Four. Results: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker

    g. Chapter Five. Discussion: Stephen Burwell and Keyln Leeker