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Foster Youth's Attachment Styles

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FOSTER YOUTH'S ATTACHMENT STYLES

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

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

by
Brenda Garcia

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

This proposed study explored if there was a common attachment style taken on by foster youth. The study explored the types of attachments that are exhibited from foster youth through the perspective of a social worker. The results potentially had an impact on the practices that are used by social workers who have constant interaction with this vulnerable population.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Children and families are constantly changing as the years go by and within those changes are obstacles that families have to overcome. With constant changes that happen throughout family units, it is important to maintain updated research on how situations affect the family, as well as exploring what issues are affecting the families in the communities today. The foster care system can have an impact in the lives of some families. With that being said, it is important to recognize what changes have to be made and asked for in the foster care system to better serve the families involved. The foster care system has the same basic idea of having children temporarily removed from biological family, but the rules and laws are changing on a daily basis, which have a direct impact on how situations are resolved. The foster care system consists of children between the ages of 0-21 years old who have been exposed to some form of neglect and/or abuse. Various cases of neglect and abuse bring children into foster care to avoid further maltreatment of physical, emotional, and psychological needs (Schor, 1982). The purpose of foster care is to have youth in an environment where he or she will no longer experience episodes of abuse and/or neglect. The foster care system is made up of several laws and regulations that are changing on an ongoing basis. Although the system is meant

to be a temporary living situation for children, it is ideal to examine what effects it could have, if any, in the development of relationships.

Working amongst the foster care population, the practice of a social worker can become impacted on a micro level. As social workers in the field, it is important to learn how to address and minimize the psychological, emotional, and social stressors, not only in relation to past abuse or neglect, but the systematic structure of foster care. Even though it may not seem clear to the public eye, the goal of foster care is for youth to reunify with loved ones and ideally help build stronger support system within the family unit. Foster care is a system made up of a team of professionals that step in to redirect disruption in the family unit in order to promote a safe and healthy environment for the children involved (Children's Bureau, 2018).

In previous studies, social workers were asked to identify how society perceives foster youth. Through Peters (2005) research, social workers reported that children in foster care are seen as throwaway kids or disposable children. These comments and beliefs create a stigma that children must learn to ignore to prevent emotional impact in the future. These views about foster youth can potentially impact the youth in being able to create attachments to others. In exploring the relationship building amongst foster youth, the challenges will come to light. Ridge and Millar (2000) commented that childhood is special in itself where norms and customs are learned. Children are exposed to relationships that encourage a child to participate in or chose to exclude themselves from.

Knowledge of the types of relationships that are established can give insight to the different types of attachment styles exist amongst this vulnerable population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore if there is a common attachment style taken on by foster youth. The study will explore the types of attachment styles that are exhibited from foster youth through the perspective of a social worker. Exploring the type of attachment style through a social worker perspective will highlight any patterns that are noted amongst the practice of social workers with this population versus social workers who work with different populations. The proposed study will explore youth's attachment styles through the use of a survey. The creation of a short survey will be administered to social workers of different fields. The survey will include demographic questions, as well as a rating scale in relevance to attachment styles from observations and exposure. This will be a descriptive study due to seeking a similar characteristic amongst a population. It will be a quantitative study due to a number scale that will be used in a survey. Once patterns in attachment styles are found, practices can be modified in order to better serve the vulnerable population.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The significance of this study will potentially have an impact on the practices that are used by social workers having constant interaction with this vulnerable population. After exploring the findings, social workers can integrate

techniques that work best with specific attachments. Once a pattern is or is not noted, it can spark ideas on how to incorporate different methods of helping foster youth and what opportunities and support can be provided. It could be that there are stigmas attached to foster youth that impact the practices that are used that can impact the types of attachments that are adopted. It could also be that social workers have similar observations and interactions with the population, but are not exposed to certain trainings and support services that could better assist the youth in creating and maintaining healthy attachment styles.

There are several models and frameworks that social workers have knowledge in, and being able to see what pattern is found amongst foster youth attachments can assist in selecting which practice will better serve the youth. Having the perspective from all social workers can also have a positive impact, in that, there is a possibility that social workers from a different field are able to use knowledge that social workers working with youth may not come to mind at first.

This further impacts social work practice, in that, social workers need to focus on addressing how each child adapts to not only the system, but being able to establish and maintaining his or her identity to further attachments (Rogers, 2017). The attachment style of foster youth, impacts the approaches a social worker takes from a micro level perspective since it is directly dealing with how a foster youth perceives a situation and relationships with others. Social workers need to introduce and help restructure any stigmas that come about with being in foster care to the foster youth being worked with. In doing this, it will allow for

foster youth to be able to create trust and establish a healthy attachment style when it comes to relationships. Taylor & McQuillan (2014) explored the different relationships that are created and experienced by foster youth that need to have a sense of stability in order for healthy attachment styles to be incorporated by foster youth.

In relation to the generalist intervention process, this study will have a strong focus in the exploration phase. At this time, the study falls under this phase due to gathering information about the attachment styles that are believed for foster youth to have. Through the questionnaires completed by social workers, the results will explore the types of attachment styles that are mostly displayed amongst foster youth. In further exploration and interpretation of the results, the types of attachments can be viewed and compared to methods used to work with these clients. Overall, this study will not only have an impact on the population that is worked with, but the social workers that cross paths with this population on a daily basis. It will improve the lenses of the social workers, resulting in different uses of interventions and practices that will be a better fit for a specific attachment style. With this being said, the research question for this project is as follows: What type of attachment style are foster youth perceived to have based on the perspective of social workers?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Between the year of 2017 and 2018, foster care rates continued to grow, the percentage of children in care increased by 2.3%, the trend remained consistent since 2012 (Children's Bureau, 2018). There is an estimate of 273,539 children who entered the foster care system in fiscal year 2016 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017). The impact of past trauma has an effect on foster youth being able to have positive relationship-building skills (Hall & Semanchin Jones, 2018).

Past Research Findings with Attachments

Past research has placed an emphasis on the positivity of relationships in order to bring about success. As reported by Piel, Geiger, Julien and Lietz (2017) creating several positive relationships can be beneficial in many different areas of a child's life. Piel, Geiger, Julien and Lietz (2017) stated the ability to create and maintain attachments can bring about opportunities for the future, as well as, reinforcing the importance of the future, regardless of the negativity occurring in his or her life. Youth who are able to create secure types of attachment have been found to have lower levels of shame and maladaptive types of guilt, in comparison to youth who have insecure attachments with higher levels of shame and maladaptive types of guilt (Muris et al., 2014).

Support can come from different parties, such as biological families, foster families, peers, support groups and even caseworkers (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2010; Wade, 2008). Research has found that the establishment of a large support network can be beneficial to youth in having greater life satisfaction, healthier lives and higher educational accomplishments, while minimizing the physical aggression and the possibility of homelessness (Ahrens et al., 2007; Reilly, 2003). Youth having greater outlets of support decreases the amount of stress, which brings about more opportunities for success (Mitchell et al., 2010). Howe (1999) reported relationships are essential in providing experiences that allow a child to make a connection between his or her personal and social world. Research reported by Howe (1999) states Attachment theory is a main component in understanding the importance of the quality in early and ongoing close relations having an affect on a child's development, socialization, and interpersonal style.

It has been reported by Perry (2006), that being separated and losing a parent as a child can impact the ability to have trusting relationships in the future, which results in the inability to develop supportive networks to replace the ones that were lost. Perry (2006) reported any type of disruption in social networks with youth who go through transitional phases creates psychological distress. Further with the transitional phases in a youth's life, comes the coping of being separated from family members and adjusting to a new lifestyle, which makes it difficult to focus on the creation of supportive relationships (Hall & Semanchin

Jones, 2018). According to Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs, and Ross (2010), the ability to create positive relationships was found to decrease levels of anxiety and depressive episodes.

When youth experience traumatizing events, he or she may have the tendency to avoid what had occurred and make it irrelevant to his or her present situation (Nilsson, Holmqvist & Jonson, 2011). For example, Garcia and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2016) explored the significance in the relationship and attachment type that gets established with foster youth and foster parents. Having healthy attachment styles truly has a positive impact on how a youth develops. Garcia and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2016), found that the relationships foster youth carry and build with foster parents potentially impact the restructure of a previous attachment style and even exposing them to creating a positive attachment style.

Friendships can be number one influencers in the development of a child. Saferstein, Neimeyer, and Hagans (2005) reported that the types of attachments an individual holds can have an impact on the friendships and relationships for the future; If the attachment styles can be identified earlier on, then it can be to the youths' benefit to redirect or reshape if needed in order to ensure positive relationships. Saferstein, Neimeyer, and Hagans (2005) went on to say that as foster youth, it becomes challenging to maintain and create friendships due to probable inconsistency in location, which can also affect the type of trust that is created with telling other youth about the foster youth label. Saferstein,

Neimeyer, and Hagans (2005) further explored that peer relationships are essential in overcoming the stigmas foster youth experience since it will create a strong support system. Creating and facilitating peer support groups or other interventions, focusing on promoting relationship building is effective as noted by Saferstein, Neimeyer, and Hagans (2005). Rogers (2017) supports the foster care system needs to improve its stability rate in order to allow foster youth to form relationships with individuals. Social support for youth includes emotional support, guidance, spending quality time, and the simple demonstration of care and love (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). If youth create relationships through positive experiences, he or she will have a healthy development, which will allow them to see themselves as secure and open to seeking assistance in the future (Howe, 1999).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Attachment theory is the best fit for the proposed study on discovering the types of attachments that are most common amongst the vulnerable population of foster youth. The types of attachment styles can be looked at to serve as a type of measurement in categorizing what each foster youth correlates with. Through the attachment theory, it has created an understanding of how social adversity puts a child at an increase risk of going through distress, conflict, and the potential development of problematic behavior (Howe, 1999).

Through the early work of John Bowlby in the 1930s, the interest to discover how and what attachments can be created sparked an area of study

that later was contributed by the works of Mary Ainsworth (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). Bowlby (1969) based his findings and discoveries from working with the vulnerable population of children. Bowlby went on to defining attachment as a psychological connectedness that could be everlasting amongst individuals and the importance of a relationship for a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment is created in the early stages of a child's life with the formation of various relationships with numerous individuals throughout his or her environment (Wilkinson, 2008).

Bowlby (1988) found that through the attachment theory, having multiple relationships are normal and each relationship is valued at a different level based on the needs that each relationship meets. Physical and emotional changes can challenge youth to feel stressed, which can cause mental health concerns when youth have not been exposed to coping skills to serve as a guide (Zhao, Young, Breslow, Michel, Flett, & Goldberg, 2015). The constant changes in youths' lives can become more stressful when there is no stability in being able to attach to others in a healthy way (Zhao, Young, Michel, Flett & Goldberg, 2015).

The lack of relationships in itself can cause future concerns related to a youth's mental health and not being able to discuss what is bothering them. Ignoring the development of healthy attachment styles at these young ages, especially with these vulnerable populations of foster youth, can create future implications. Leaving these negative attachment styles and not addressing it in time can affect the types of relationships that a foster youth will get into in the

future. For example, if a foster youth has an attachment style where he or she is viewed to be very needy then it would be difficult to keep people involved in his or her life. As reported by Weiss, MacMullin, Waechter and Wekerle (2011), this can also lead to possible relationships involving violence, causing the youth to be in a never-ending circle of negative attachments.

What is lacking in research is following the youth all the way into his or her adulthood to see if there is a change in attachment style or if an attachment style at a young age gets carried out throughout the adult years. Having research that follows a foster youth into adult years would be ideal in being able to see how much of an impact an attachment style has on youth.

Summary

Overall, this population may or may not follow a pattern for a certain attachment style. It is important to take into account the experiences and observations that social workers view in working with this population. In doing so, it can improve the type of care that a foster youth receives, along with the approaches social workers carry forth.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study explored if social workers have similar impressions of the types of attachment styles amongst foster youth. This proposed study was a descriptive study, in that similar attachment styles were looked into. This chapter contained specifics in the study design, sampling techniques, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

Through this study design, social workers received a multiple-choice survey, which was answered based on the social workers personal experience. This study took on a descriptive design due to seeking similar responses in relation to attachment style amongst the foster youth population. It was a quantitative study due to discovering if there was a predominant attachment style amongst foster youth according to social workers.

The strength in this design was having the ability to reach out to several social workers in order to complete the short survey and not having it take too much time from his or her busy schedules. This quantitative design allowed for easy to understand responses, rather than having to interpret short answered or extensive interviews. The similarities for attachment styles were easily discovered through the questions being asked and what type of experience a social work had with the population.

This limitation in this design was the amount of depth that was taken from it. The social workers completing the survey had to base the response on the availability of choices, even if it did not correspond 100% to what he or she believes when it came to attachment styles. Another limitation was having the target audience be the social workers instead of the foster youth in order to provide an accurate representation of attachment styles.

Sampling

In this study, the sample was composed of social workers at a foster care agency. Non-probability, availability sampling was used for this study. The availability sampling best fit this study due to providing the survey to whichever social worker was willing to do so in the foster agency. The sample consisted of about 25 social workers. Social workers were being selected to complete the surveys because he or she had consistent exposure to the foster youth. The social workers may have also observed certain aspects to attachment behaviors that the youth may not have been able to pin point.

Data Collection and Instruments

The instrument for this study is found in Appendix B. The survey had a combination of “yes” or “no” questions and multiple-choice questions relating to attachment style. The survey that was administered was self-created. An example of a demographics question was: “have you worked with foster youth? If so, for how many years?” An example of an attachment question was: “ what

attachment style is most predominant in foster youth”. The validity for the created survey was assessed through the discussions with research instructor, as well as, research supervisor. Face validity and content validity were explored in that the questions were related to exposure of foster youth and the types of attachment styles in which the research is seeking to explore. To provide a breakdown of the demographics of the respondents of this study descriptive statistics were conducted. The independent variable for this study was foster care exposure, and it was answered with a basic yes or no, making the level of measurement nominal dichotomous. The dependent variable was attachment, which explored the type of attachment style that was most predominate in foster youth, making it a nominal categorical level of measurement.

Procedures

The procedures consisted of approaching social workers at a foster care agency. I then asked each individual social worker if they were willing to participate in a short survey for a research project on attachment styles with foster youth. I ensured that neither social worker felt obligated to complete the survey if he or she wished not to. For the social workers that declined participation, I respectfully thanked them and moved on to the next social worker. For the social workers that said yes, I handed them a small packet, which consisted of the informed consent form and survey that was enclosed in a manila envelope. The survey was administered during business hours at the office location of the foster agency. Once the survey was completed by the social

worker, the survey was placed back in the manila envelope in order to maintain confidentiality of the responses when it was submitted. Once the surveys were completed, the responses were reviewed for similarities and differences on attachment styles.

Protection of Human Subjects

The selected participants for the study were kept confidential and voluntary. The social workers were provided with a packet. The packet included an informed consent form and survey, all enclosed in a manila envelope for privacy. The selected participants were informed of what the study was about before reading over the informed consent form, in which, the letter “X” was asked for as a signature instead of his or her name. Upon completion of the survey, the social worker was thanked for his or her participation. The social worker placed the packet back into the manila envelope in order to ensure confidentiality of the responses and social worker. Any information that was to be transferred on the computer for analysis purposes was transferred on a flash drive under encryption.

Data Analysis

Once all the surveys were completed, similarities in answers were taken into consideration. To answer the research question, in which the independent variable was exposure to working with foster youth and the dependent variable being the type of attachment style believed to be predominant, the study

examined the responses through frequency statistics. Analysis of the data was best represented through the compilation of frequency charts in SPSS. Based on the way the questions were formulated and the structure of the responses, other tests were not compiled through SPSS in order to effectively answer the research question. After determining what attachment styles was most common, integration of services could be better provided by the social workers in order to promote positive attachment styles.

Summary

This study explored similar characteristics in social workers perspective of attachment styles that were adopted by foster youth. The attachment styles were noted from social workers observations and interactions with foster youth. Discovering similar attachment styles made an impact on how social workers interact with foster youth.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The following chapter will include visual representations of the general findings from the study. It will include descriptive statistics of foster care attachment styles through the perspective of social workers. Due to the format of the questions asked and the response choices, frequency statistics were generated through SPSS.

Demographics

The data consisted of 25 social workers from a foster care agency with experience in working with foster children. The age of social workers ranged from 23 to 62, with the median age being 41 years old. Figure 1 reflects 28% of the social workers held a bachelor's degree, 64% of the social workers held a master's degree, and 8% of the social workers held a PhD. On average the social workers experience with foster care was 10 years as shown on Figure 2.

Figure 1. Participant's Highest Degree Earned

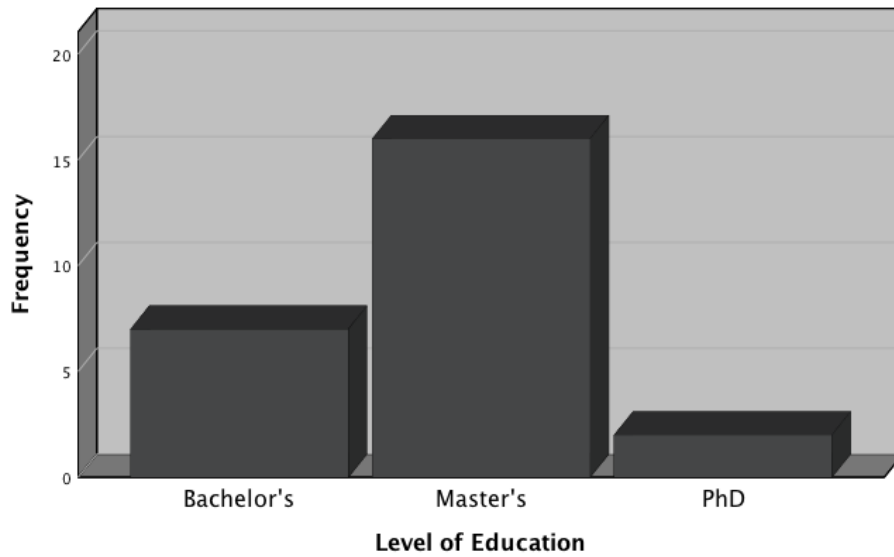
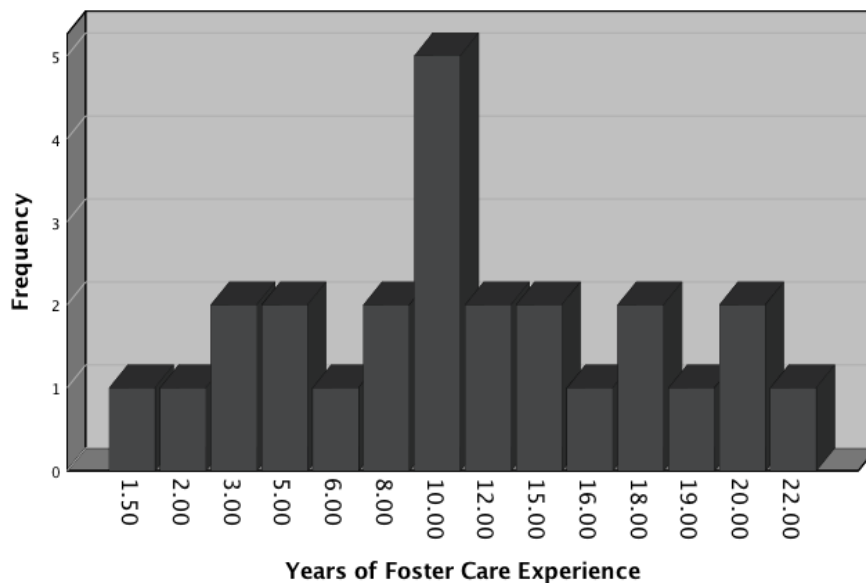


Figure 2. Years Of Foster Care Experience



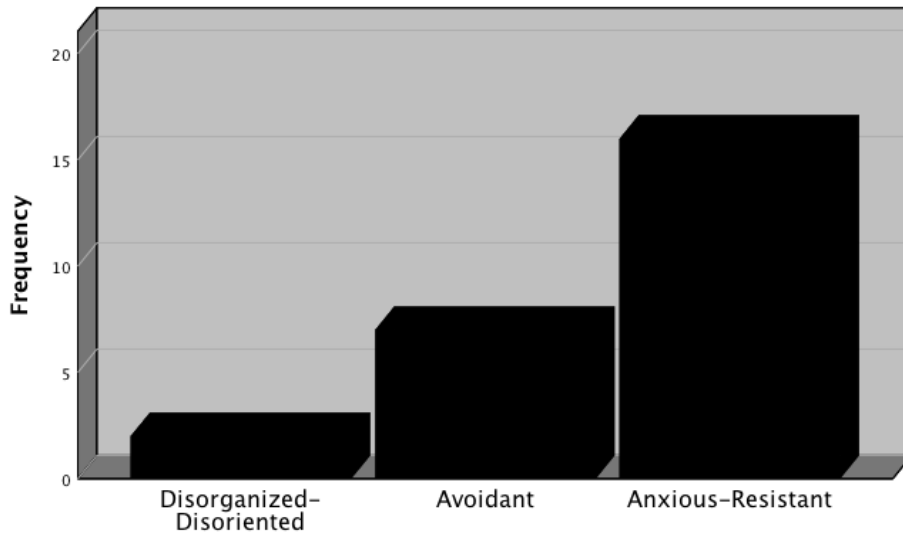
Most Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth

Social workers in this study were asked what attachment style did they believe to be present in foster youth they have had experience with. Table 1 and Figure 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the most predominant attachment styles based on the responses received. The top three responses were anxious-resistant attachment (64.0%), avoidant attachment (28.0%), and disorganized-disoriented attachment (8.0%). Through the responses received it appears that based on the experiences that social workers have had with foster youth, most of them are perceived to have an anxious-resistant type of attachment style.

Table 1. Most Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Disorganized-Disoriented	2	8.0
Avoidant	7	28.0
Anxious-Resistant	16	64.0

Figure 3. Most Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth



Foster Care Impact On Foster Youth Attachment

Social workers in this study were asked if foster care impacts a foster youth's attachment style. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the responses received by the social workers. 76% of the social workers responded that foster care does impact a foster youth's attachment style. 24% of the social workers responded that foster care does not impact a foster youth's attachment style.

Table 2. Foster Care Impact On Foster Youth Attachment

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
YES	19	76.0
NO	6	24.0

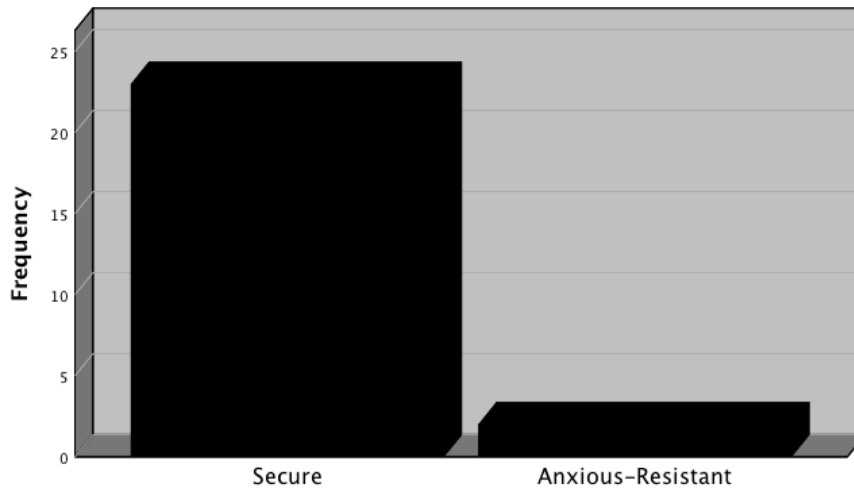
Least Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth

Social workers were asked what attachment style was least predominant in foster youth based on personal experience. Table 3 and Figure 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the least predominant attachment styles based on the responses received. The top two responses were secure attachment (92.0%) and avoidant attachment (8.0%).

Table 3. Least Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
SECURE	23	92.0
AVOIDANT	2	8.0

Figure 4. Least Predominant Attachment Style In Foster Youth



Summary

In review, chapter four reviewed the results of foster youth attachment styles through the perspectives of foster care social workers. Through the use of frequency statistics, there were three predominant attachment styles perceived to exist within foster youth from the perspective of social workers. From the responses received through the questionnaires, the most predominant attachment style reported by social workers for foster youth is anxious-resistant.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will elaborate on the findings from this quantitative study, discussion of the limitations within the study, and addressing the implications for the social work profession. The research question was to explore what type of attachment style are foster youth perceived to have based on the perspective of social workers. Despite the limitations in SPSS outputs and compilations, the following data results clearly depicted that there are similarities amongst social worker observations when it comes to the type of attachment style a foster youth exhibits.

Discussion

Literature regarding attachment styles and foster youth are quite limited. The literature that is present as previously stated in a prior chapter is based on perceptions and interpretations from other individuals other than the foster youth themselves. Even though the study placed a focus on social workers rather than foster youth, the information pulled from the study can contribute to future efforts of creating change in practices and improving approaches.

From this study conducted, it could be implied that foster youth are perceived to have similar attachment styles when it comes from the perspectives of social workers that have experience working with foster youth. The statistic of

the most predominant attachment style is important to note. From the 25 participants, 64.0% perceive foster youth to adopt an anxious-resistant attachment style. The responses to the various questions were showing consistency in the attachment style that was most perceived by the participating social workers. Foster care brings about various youth who undergo different experiences, which are put under similar categories. The experiences of foster care could be different for each foster youth, but yet there are similar attachment styles that foster youth adopt while in the foster care system. These attachment styles are observed by the social workers that have constant interaction with them and monitor the progress.

Even though the experience of social workers working with foster youth varied, there was still a consistency with what was being observed through the interactions that were made. It was surprising to see that from the 25 participants, 76% of the social workers perceived that foster care had an impact on foster youth. Such responses might suggest that there is a similarity between the social workers that have experience in working with foster youth and share similar observations throughout the numerous youth in the system.

The attachment styles that are made when youth are involved in the system could be a result of the system itself, and being able to explore the system through the eyes of foster youth directly could make an impact and create a positive change. After all, youth could be impacted by what is around them and the foster care environment itself could be a main contributor to changes in their

attachment styles. The foster care environment is supposed to benefit the child temporarily until the biological family is able to provide a stable and safe environment, but it could be causing more harm than good.

In the study a question was also asked regarding attachment style towards biological family. Social workers who participated in the survey selected disruptive type of attachment styles. Such selection of attachment could have been due to the allegation that brought the youth into care and judgment was based from that. If a foster youth was asked about the attachment style that they believe is held towards their biological family, a different response could have been received due to their own perspective of the situation. Taking the perceptions from foster youth towards their biological families could provide greater insight and direct effective services and techniques in order to bring the family unit together at a faster rate and/or address certain situations through a different approach. There could be more to the story that the foster youth are aware of that social workers may not have immediate access or knowledge to.

The descriptive statistics gathered from the survey are consistent in that there is a predominant attachment style in foster youth. Such findings are foster youth having difficult attachment styles is consistent with the literature due to the limitations of having this type of research done from the perspective of other individuals other than the foster youth themselves. In past research it was also explored that foster youth who can create positive attachment styles will have the

ability to create positive attachment styles in their own personal relationships in the future.

Limitations

There have been quite a few studies on attachment styles however there are limitations on how in-depth the research can truly be due to different obstacles. In this study, there were several limitations that became present throughout the study, which caused an impact on the research.

One of the limitations with the study is the questionnaire itself. The multiple choice format was time-efficient for participants to complete, however, once data was entered into SPSS and tests were ran, the verbiage of the questions could have been formatted differently in order to cater more to the research question. Due to the verbiage approach that was taken in the questionnaire it created a limitation on the SPSS tests that were administered. Based on the way the questions were worded, the responses were valid, but only permitted for frequency statistics to be presented in this descriptive study. Open-ended questions would have been useful as well, in order to have the social workers elaborate on the thoughts for why and what attachment styles are perceived for foster youth to have. An open-ended question could have been added under the multiple choice question of what attachment style is predominant in foster youth in order to provide more insight for the research question. An open-ended question could have also been included under the multiple-choice question of foster care impacting foster youth. Such question is

quite vague and having an open-ended space would have allowed for social workers to share what it is about foster care that impacts foster youth.

Another limitation noted within this study was the sample size in order to make the responses reliable. The sample size was limited to one agency and all participants were in the foster care department. One of the questions asked in the demographic portion consisted of having experience with foster youth. Given that the participants were in a foster care department, it was already implied that exposure to foster youth was there. It would have been interesting to see if support staff within the department shared the same perspectives, even including social workers that do not have foster care experience. The presentation of the questionnaire could have reached more social workers if it was conducted via online formatting. Having an online format of the questionnaire could have been more efficient for some social workers instead of a paper format. Due to the format, there were limitations on how many social workers were reached and asked to participate. Having more social workers participate could have also brought about different results for the study. In addition, expanding the questionnaire to social workers who do not work directly with foster youth could have also brought about another perspective in order to compare if there is a difference between foster care social worker assumptions and non-foster care social worker assumptions.

Furthermore, the selection of participants impacted the results of the study. The study consisted of looking into attachment styles for foster youth. Instead of choosing individuals, such as social workers who work directly with the foster youth, the results would be more beneficial from the minds of the foster youth themselves. A whole system is created around individuals who believe they know what foster youth need instead of taking the time to ask foster youth directly what it is they actually need. Being able to have input from a foster youth and a social work could create a positive impact in creating stronger attachment styles and positive impact on the foster care system itself to promote those positive attachment styles.

Limitations in attachment style research have been present in various studies. Being able to incorporate the correct verbiage and further follow up in attachment style research will bring about a more clear representation of the true attachment styles that get carried out throughout the life of a foster youth. It could be that the time a foster youth is in care has no relevance to a negative attachment style in the future, even if in the current moment there is a negative attachment style being displayed by the foster youth. There could also be a possibility that certain biases are created from working with this vulnerable population that certain aspects are exemplified by social worker observations which results in the assumptions of negative attachment styles being present

Recommendations For Social Work Practice Policy and Research

It would be recommended that future research be conducted directly with foster youth based on attachment styles and foster care in order to expand the statistics and knowledge about how or what policy practices could be reframed or revised to bring about success. Through the findings discovered in this study and having consistency in three attachment styles perceived for foster youth to have, different trainings or conversations could be brought up in order to address those attachment styles. A staff meeting could service as a time to discuss the incorporation of different methods to work with the foster youth in supporting the attachment style currently present and working towards a healthy attachment style. Collaboration with therapists would also be beneficial so social workers can note their observations in order to address and compliment the skills through therapy sessions as well and support the overall goal of providing support and advocating success for the foster youth. Having the insight from foster youth could redirect the practices in place and could create new policies that would benefit foster youth entering the foster care system and enhance skills for social workers who work directly with them.

A most effective approach to having a clear understanding of attachment styles is with the direct population itself. Not only at the given moment, but also assessing if there is a change in attachment in foster youth as they go into adulthood. There is very little research that follows foster youth into their adulthood in order to see if foster care and the attachment style carries out into

their lives. Once this type of research is conducted, it can be compared to what social workers perspectives are and examine similarities and differences. With noting the differences, social work practices and policies can be looked at in order to see what is it about the system that creates negative attachment styles and what is it about foster care itself that causes a disruption, if any, in foster youth. Knowing these differences and similarities will also strengthen the skill sets and approaches that are taken on by social workers that may work with foster youth.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study explored what type of attachment style foster youth are perceived to have based on the perspective of social workers. It was interesting that social workers working with foster youth had consistent perceptions of attachment styles amongst foster youth. Due to the results of the study, it was found that there were three common attachment styles perceived for foster youth to have. Such attachment styles were: anxious-resistant (64.0%), avoidant (28.0%), and disorganized-disoriented (8.0%). Even though there were limitations in the study, there was consistency observed in the responses. It would be interesting for further research to be conducted, which should place more of an emphasis on the foster youth being the direct respondents to shine a light on the existing literature and research.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore what type of attachment style foster youth are perceived to have based on the perspective of social workers. The study is being conducted by Brenda Garcia, a graduate student, under the supervision of Thomas Davis, Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to explore attachment styles amongst foster youth.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions about demographics and attachment styles that have been observed within foster youth.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. Please note that specific information regarding previous or current foster youth will not be asked. The questions will be asked in a general format based on experience. You may skip a question or end your participation at any time.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research to better serve the foster youth population.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Thomas Davis at (909) 537- 3839.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2021.

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here

Date

APPENDIX B
ATTACHMENT SURVEY

ATTACHMENT STYLE IN FOSTER YOUTH

DEMOGRAPHICS

Answer the following questions. Please fill in the blanks or circle the appropriate response.

1. What is your age (years)?

2. What is your highest level of education?

- a. High School Diploma/No High School Diploma
- b. Bachelor's Degree
- c. Master's Degree
- d. Doctorate Degree
- e. Other

3. Have you worked with foster youth? If so, for how many years?

4. What age group of foster youth have you worked with (circle all that apply)?

- a. 0-5
- b. 6-12
- c. 13-17
- d. 18+
- e. All of the above

ATTACHMENT

Please respond to the following questions based on your experience. You may use the attachment style legend for your reference for the following questions.

<p>Secure: Confident, Resilient</p> <p>Anxious-Resistant: Emotional, Obsessive</p> <p>Avoidant: Isolated, Distant</p> <p>Disorganized-Disoriented: Dramatic, Unpredictable</p>

5. What attachment style(s) are you familiar with?

- a. Secure: Confident, Resilient
- b. Anxious-Resistant: Emotional, Obsessive
- c. Avoidant: Isolated, Distant
- d. Disorganized-Disoriented: Dramatic, Unpredictable
- e. All of the above

6. What attachment style is most predominant in foster youth?

- a. Secure Attachment
- b. Anxious-Resistant Attachment

- c. Avoidant Attachment
 - d. Disorganized-Disoriented Attachment
7. **What attachment style is least predominant in foster youth?**
- a. Secure Attachment
 - b. Anxious-Resistant Attachment
 - c. Avoidant Attachment
 - d. Disorganized-Disoriented Attachment
8. **What attachment style is most predominant between foster youth and biological family?**
- a. Secure Attachment
 - b. Anxious-Resistant Attachment
 - c. Avoidant Attachment
 - d. Disorganized-Disoriented Attachment
9. **What type of attachment do you feel you have with foster youth?**
- a. Secure Attachment
 - b. Anxious-Resistant Attachment
 - c. Avoidant Attachment
 - d. Disorganized-Disoriented Attachment
10. **Do foster children have a difficult time creating and maintaining relationships?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. **Do foster children exhibit honesty, support, independence, and a sense of security in relationships?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
12. **Do foster children have the tendency to isolate themselves when it comes to relationships?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. **Do foster children exhibit high levels of dependency?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
14. **Do foster children have a problem with commitment and expressing emotions?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
15. **Does foster care impact a foster child's attachment style?**
- a. Yes
 - b. No

APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2020-245

Brenda Garcia Thomas Davis
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Brenda Garcia Thomas Davis

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Foster Youth's Attachment Styles" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino has determined your application meets the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. The exempt determination does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.
- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2020-245 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be

directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DG/MG

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