5-2023

FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND THE UTILIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND THE UTILIZATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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
Liliana Lua
Jacqueline Viadas
May 2023
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May 2023
Approved by:

Carolyn McAllister, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Yawen Li, M.S.W. Research Coordinator
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ABSTRACT

The current research indicates that former foster youth entering post-secondary education do not have the same outcomes as the general population when it comes to the completion of educational goals (AA degree, Bachelor’s degree and Master’s degree). This research study used an exploratory design which focused on finding the role that utilization of mental health services and treatments play on academic outcomes for this population. Through qualitative interviews, respondents served as experts in this area and they provided their unique experience regarding this topic. The goal of this study was to reduce uncertainty in the literature, identify past barriers, limitations, define past outcomes, quality of services, and determine appropriateness of mental health services. The findings of this study reflected themes relevant to this population, in regard to mental health utilization. There were similarities with current research, but also new areas that have not been explored in current literature. This research identified changes that must be implemented to influence change in social work practices and improve the overall educational outcomes for former foster youth. Recommendations are to use these findings to implement programs that establish healthy relationship building, mentorship, and mental health.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the contributions of our respondents. Additionally, we want to give thanks to the expertise and guidance provided to us by our research supervisor.
DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to our families. Thank you for your unwavering support.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Youth in the foster care system have higher rates of mental health issues (Jones, 2014; Miller, 2020; Villagrana et al., 2018; White, 2015). These issues are related to a variety of concerns including trauma related to removal from parents and/or separation from family and community. Foster youth are likely to experience educational lag due to placement changes and past traumas from their original homes (Jones, 2014). Due to these challenges, foster children also have higher rates of mental health related services to address these issues (Villagrana et al., 2018). The emotional trauma that comes with being removed from parents leaves a lasting impression on children and follows them into adulthood.

Mental health services do not always suffice when overcoming these traumas. Foster youth exiting the foster care system are not always adequately prepared to face the challenges in areas of housing, transportation, employment, basic living skills, and skills necessary for creating and maintaining long-term relationships (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013). Young adults aging out of the foster care system face unresolved issues and little sense of direction. As much as 54.4% of former foster youth report current mental health issues compared to 22.1% in the general population (Pecora et al., 2009). Additionally, the lack of
preparedness can lead the foster youth to experience high levels of stress. This causes under-utilization and the individual may not possess the skills or knowledge to seek out these services.

Research indicates that there is a decline in mental health service utilization when foster youth age out of the foster care system (Villagrana et al., 2018). Former foster care recipients are more susceptible to a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder, and drug and alcohol dependence are some of the mental and behavioral issues (Pecora et al., 2009). Transition to independence is difficult for any youth, but especially for those who have spent their childhood and adolescence in foster care. Stressors of adulthood can lead to further complexity of mental health issues which can lead to negative outcomes (Piel & Lacasse, 2017). This can make life decisions regarding employment and education seem like daunting tasks.

Young adults formerly in foster care graduate college or university at a much lower percentage compared to non-former foster youth (Salisberry, 2016). Only about 70% of foster youth graduate from high school and out of them, only 4% graduate with a bachelor’s degree (Salisberry, 2016). Oftentimes, there are barriers that former foster youth face once enrolled in to a university or college. Barriers include assistance with completing applications, lack of knowledge of how on transferring to a university from a community college, financial shortcomings, lack of housing, and mental health problems (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012).
On a macro level, the issue of foster children aging out of the system without support or resources has been a point of contention for some time. In 2010, Assembly Bill 12 (A.B.12) was passed in order to allow young adults to stay in foster care until the age of 21. A.B.12 increased support systems and assistance with educational and employment opportunities (CA A.B. 12, 2010). This voluntary program is often recognized as Extended Foster Care. Additionally, A.B. 12 enables foster youth to keep their Medi-Cal insurance past the age of emancipation from foster care through Medi-Cal. Medi-Cal eligibility enables former foster youth to have access to medical and mental health services. Former foster youth remain eligible until the age of 26 years old. In addition, most universities and colleges have on-campus mental health programs the students can access that are already included in the cost of tuition (Salisberry, 2016).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study is to identify to what extent former foster youth pursuing post-secondary education take advantage of mental health services. In addition, this research study will contribute in reducing uncertainty outlined in current literature which identifies barriers, limitations, outcomes, quality of services, appropriateness of mental health services and causes of adulthood decline in use of services. Finally, this research study indicates if former foster youth who have supportive adults around them (family, foster family, friends) experience an improved overall outcome.
This research study focuses specifically on previous foster youth who are attending or have attended any type of postsecondary school(s). The literature review indicates that some foster youth are not prepared with independent living skills like employment training, forming relationships, and accessing mental health service (White et al., 2011). In addition, traumatic events that foster youth experience in childhood can carry psychological effects as they enter adulthood. Nationwide only 1% to 5% of former foster youth graduate from a university with a bachelor’s degree (Rios & Rocco, 2014). This study aims to find any gaps in services being provided and find any correlation between the overall outcomes and the specific current experience or history of the respondents.

The broad overview of the research methods that were employed in this study were exploratory with a qualitative design. The study employed self-administered one-on-one interviews conducted via Zoom video chat. This research design was selected because the study’s focus is on a sampling size of 7-10 respondents. Open-ended questions were utilized in order to solicit the respondent to shed light on their own and specific experiences with mental health services, college, and their outcome to date. Scaling questions and close ended questions were also integrated into the interview. By interviewing the respondents, it provided us with spontaneous responses, non-verbal responses, and the ability to ask follow up questions based on the type of conversation and information that was provided.
Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Gaps exist in the utilization of mental health resources by former foster young adults in college. Findings from our study on former foster youth utilizing mental health services provide insight into the relationship between postsecondary education and mental health issues. Results of this study contribute to social work practice by providing information that can assist in uncovering barriers and limitations regarding the low rate of former foster youth graduating college. This study informed the exploring stage of the generalist intervention process and uncovered common themes and patterns regarding mental health among this population.

Regarding child welfare, the findings of this study can assist both social workers and former foster youths. The findings about utilization of mental health services can assist in bridging gaps and lead to higher rates of college attendance and graduation amongst former foster youth. This can be done by developing policies, tools, and methods to assist with utilization of mental health services. Though these changes social workers can be better equipped to support and help prepare youth for their transition out of foster care. Former foster youth would have the best possible outcomes when transitioning out of foster care and to ensure college success.

Although there are available resources, research tells us there is still a need for support amongst this population in several aspects. The question our
study addresses is: To what extent do former foster youth attending post-secondary education utilize mental health services?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter includes an exploration of research regarding the topic of former foster youth and obstacles in obtaining mental health services while pursuing postsecondary education. The subsections consist of barriers to utilization of mental health services, challenges in independent living skills, and obstacles that this population encounters in a postsecondary educational setting. The last subsection relates to theories guiding conceptualization, in which the Systems Theory is applied to provide a holistic lens to the issue of former foster youth in postsecondary education.

Mental Health and Former Foster Youth in Postsecondary Education

The transition to postsecondary education is a stressful time for any young adult. Many factors play a role in the graduating rates of former foster youth. Mental health stability is critical to well-being and academic success (Miller, Blakeslee, & Ison, 2020). Former foster youth in particular, start at a disadvantage in the areas of independent living skills. For example, employment seeking skills and employment training. In addition, this population lacks expertise with interpersonal areas like relationships forming and do not seek mental health treatment when required (White et al., 2011).
Mental Health

The rate at which former foster youth experience mental health related issues is a prevalent issue among researchers (Jones, 2014; Miller, 2020; Villagrana 2018; White, 2015). Research indicates that traumatic events that foster youth face during childhood affect them psychologically into adulthood. According to the American Society for Positive Care of Children (2021), 74.9% of children in foster care have experienced neglect, 17.5% physical abuse, 9.3% sexual abuse, and 6.1% psychological abuse. In addition, foster youth also experience stressors related to placement changes, lack of support, and transitioning to adulthood (Jones, 2014; Piel & Lacasse, 2017). This history leads to mental health diagnosis such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance abuse (Miller, 2020). Numerous studies cite a connection between children in foster care and mental health conditions (Courtney et al. 2007; Jones, 2014; Miller, Blakeslee, & Ison, 2020; Pecora et al. 2009).

Mental health stability and participation in treatment is indicative of a higher ability to overcome obstacles in the transition from foster care to adulthood. A study done by White, O'Brien, Pecora, and Buher (2015), sought to uncover the relationship between mental health and educational outcomes of former foster youth. Results indicated almost three quarters of foster care “alumni” had one mental health diagnosis and approximately half had a mental health issue within the last year (White et al., 2015). Overall, findings demonstrated that former foster youth need more available and appropriate
services. The findings of this study, though important, are not completely
generalizable since it primarily focuses on former foster youth in Michigan.

Another limitation to note is that the sample was predominantly female and the
interview response rate was low, at 21.5% (White et al., 2015). There are gaps in
the research with regards to the effects that untreated mental health diagnosis
has on former foster youth pursuing postsecondary education.

Barriers to Mental Health Services

   The literature indicates that there is a reduction in use of mental health
services when foster youth enter adulthood (Havlcek, Garcia, Smith, 2012;
Jones, 2014; Piel & Lacasse, 2017). The mental health problems do not decline,
instead a decline in utilization of services exists. Havlcek, Garcia, and Smith
(2012) present that during a time when mental health and substance use issues
excel, there is a decline of mental health service utilization among former foster
youth. A study by McMillen & Raghavan (2009), reported that mental health
services went from 35% at age 17 to 10% at age 19, and is estimated to
decrease further with age.

   The decline in mental health utilization may have several causes. It may
be financial, lack of insurance, accessibility, but may also have to do with feeling
that services did not benefit former foster youth and fatigue from overload of
services while they were in the system (Piel & Lacasse, 2017). In order for
mental health needs of former foster youth be met, it is necessary to understand
what their experience with services has been and to what degree they feel it has
benefitted them (Piel & Lacasse, 2017). Although there is supported evidence that there is a decline in the use of services, research is unclear as to why and the extent to which former foster youth in postsecondary education are utilizing mental health services. Most of the studies done with former foster youth are cross sectional. It is unclear if these patterns carry on into later adulthood (Jones, 2014). Some studies argue that that lack of mental health service use amongst former foster young adults is due to the lack of quality and appropriate services and more should be done to address these concerns (Villagrana, 2018; White, 2015).

**Challenges in Independent Living Skills**

The literature indicates that former foster youth do not have the parental and family support along with independent living skills required to be prepared for adulthood and postsecondary education (Kinarsky, 2017). Former foster youth struggle with unresolved emotional issues that result in lower educational accomplishments (Thompson, Stevenson Wojciak, & Cooley, 2018). Foster youth report they do not feel confident in their ability to be independent at 18 years of age (Thompson, Stevenson Wojciak, & Cooley, 2018). This is the case even when foster youth are encouraged to prepare and have the exposure to independence skills though workshops and/or caregivers.

**Former Foster Youth in College**

According to the literature, about 23,000 young adults who are aging out of the foster care system want to pursue a college degree (Children's Bureau,
2015). Due to obstacles, most former foster youth do not follow through with these aspirations. About 10% former foster youth earn a bachelor’s degree (Rios & Rocco, 2014). Additionally, 50% of former foster youth residing in California ranging in ages 16-20, have a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse disorder (Thompson, Stevenson Wojciak, & Cooley, 2018). Because of these numbers, researching the barriers associated with what prevents them from reaching their goals is important. Studies show that former foster youth pursuing higher education find barriers in the following areas: academics, housing, food insecurity, balancing finances, employment, basic life skills, support from peers, untreated mental health diagnosis and the lack of utilization of support services on campus (Kinarsky, 2017).

In addition, educational deficits are present and often have not been overcome by the student when they begin postsecondary education (Davis, 2006). These barriers can extend the time it takes to complete a bachelor’s degree (or other program). Some research indicates that employment, personal finances, housing and food insecurity are interrelated as one can affect the others. For example, if a job is not secured, housing and food insecurity may become a stressor or issue that can affect school (Cunningham & Diversi, 2013). According to the research, former foster youth students admitted to struggling with homelessness and only half reported they looked for help from someone on campus (Cunningham, M.J. & Diversi, M. 2013). This indicates that
student’s reluctance to identify and seek out support available to former foster youth is in large part what leads to unresolved homelessness.

Former foster youth are reluctant to identify themselves as such. Colleges require foster youth to disclose their history in order to access on-campus resources and many choose to not disclose. The research indicates that there is a correlation between foster youth not identifying as former foster youth and having access to support systems offered at higher learning institutions. Relationships with peers on campus can be difficult to build. Former foster youth students feel isolated from peers and lack supportive networks (Jones, 2014). A gap in the research exists with regards to why former foster youth are not identifying and what postsecondary institutions can do to improve the percentage of students that are willing to identify as former foster youth and get support needed.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The Systems Theory was utilized to conceptualize a holistic view of the many situations that surround foster youth as they enter adulthood (Schelbe et al., 2018). The Systems Theory frames the areas that make it difficult for former foster youth to attain their academic goals while also remaining healthy in other areas of their lives including their mental health (Schelbe et al., 2018). Systems Theory is based on the idea that systems affect one another. Larger systems are assumed to be made up of various smaller systems and together they create a larger and more complex system. The systems theory is based on the
relationship of interconnected parts that together work as an ordered whole—a system (Schelbe et al., 2018).

Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) introduced systems theory. It was based on certain principles that set guidelines on system functions. The principles are: 1) Systems are connected parts of an organized whole; 2) each part affects other parts and the whole; 3) the entire system is greater than the sum of its parts; 4) systems are explained by their limitations; 5) systems get input and feedback from their environment; 6) systems seek to accomplish goals 7) systems strive towards equilibrium. Scholars have used the principles of the system theory in efforts to interpret social and human interactions (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Luhmann, 1995; Parsons, 1991).

The utilization of mental health services amongst former foster youth is a complex issue with several encompassing factors. When approached through the Systems Theory lens, we will be able to conceptualize how different surrounding systems such as time in foster care, independent living skills, and overall mental health affect one another. When using Systems Theory we can see how these surrounding factors affect the lives of former foster youth and in turn affect postsecondary educational outcomes.

Summary

This study explored the barriers and facilitators to mental health services among former foster youth that have attended or are attending postsecondary school as perceived by the individual adult former foster youth themselves.
Former foster youth experience childhood trauma that may be unresolved as they exit foster care and enter higher education. This population faces similar challenges that other general populations face. However, the literature indicates they face specific challenges that require additional support. Unfortunately, this population is not gaining access to adequate mental health services for a number of reasons. The Trauma-Informed practice model can help higher educational settings understand this population and implement structures that will better support and address the needs of this population. This study seeks to uncover what role the degree of utilization of mental health services has on academic attainment for former foster youth who attend postsecondary education.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

Introduction

This study sought to explore the extent to which former foster youth utilize mental health services in postsecondary education and to identify themes that surface throughout the interviewing process. This chapter explains the details of how this study was conducted. Detailed information will be discussed in this chapter regarding the study design, sampling, data collection, instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

Study Design

With this study, our intent was to uncover utilization of mental health services amongst former foster youth in post-secondary education. Our study took an exploratory approach with the purpose of discovering common patterns amongst the population. Research in regards to what extent this population is actually using mental health services is scarce, especially from the point of view of the former foster youth themselves. Through qualitative interviews, the aim was to capture the unique experience of each respondent in regards to this topic. Ultimately, piecing together common patterns, themes, and challenges. The study primarily used open-ended questions during the individual interviews allowing the respondent to answer freely and gain the most genuine insight possible.
The strengths of using an exploratory qualitative approach were that the interviewer was able to obtain each respondent’s interpretation of their experience. Both mental health and time in foster care are very personal experiences that can differ vastly depending on personal insight. This study aimed to bring to light common patterns by still acknowledging each respondent’s unique interpretation as opposed to using a survey method with closed-ended questions where answers at times are generalized. With an exploratory study we had the liberty to ask follow-up questions with the goal of encouraging a more conversational interview that provided the respondents with comfort and trust.

There are some aspects of the qualitative interview approach that can be seen as challenges or weaknesses. A qualitative interview is more intrusive than a quantitative approach and respondents may be hesitant to disclose personal experiences. There is the possibility of the respondent wanting to appear in a certain light and withholding information. There is also the challenge of anonymity, although proper measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of the respondents, anonymity is more difficult to ensure during interviews. Another possible limitation would be the number of respondents we recruited. Qualitative research generally works with a smaller pool of respondents compared to quantitative research that is more focused on numbers. Since our focus is primarily on the respondents’ experiences, we did not aim to interview a large number of respondents. This may be seen as a weakness in certain instances.
Sampling

In this study, a non-probability snowball sampling method was utilized. The goal was to interview 7-10 former foster youth adults that have attended or are currently attending postsecondary schools. The former foster youths that we contacted initially were personal acquaintances and friends that we met at work, school, or other friendships. We contacted each person via personal cell phone or personal social media. These persons were selected because they were able to recommend our research interview opportunity to other former foster youth that met our criteria. They represent a variety of demographics, which include varied age range 21-49, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data was collected using Zoom video recording to perform one on one interviews between the interviewer and respondent. Demographics were collected at the start of interview by asking questions verbally (Appendix A). The instrument used to conduct this study was an interview guide (Appendix A) that was developed by the researchers with a variety of questions pertaining to the topic of mental health and post-secondary education. There was a majority of open-ended questions, but also scaling questions and yes or no questions to ensure a well-rounded interview. Some of the questions we used are as follows: How would you rate your overall mental health? Why? Do you participate in mental health services such as counseling or therapy? Why or why not? Have you ever participated in mental health services in the past? Did you find it
beneficial? On a scale of 1-10 how stressed or overwhelmed do you feel in regards to school and your education? What would it take for that number to go up 1 number? What are the areas of school/education that cause the most stress? Work load? Time-Management? Navigating the school system?

This instrument was created by taking the aspects of the study we were trying to uncover and crafting questions that would yield the most open responses. The majority of our questions related to mental health, postsecondary education, and time in foster care. Reliability of the research instrument was maintained by developing questions informed by the literature. Researchers ensured validity of the interview guide throughout its development by taking into account anecdotal experience, previous studies, and relevant literature. Research supervisor further revised the interview guide and provided feedback. The strengths in relation to this instrument are since it is an interview guide with open ended questions, the respondents were freely open to answer questions as it related to their own experiences. A limitation in relation to the instrument is that since it is a new instrument, there are no previous studies that have previously proven its effectiveness.

Procedures

An email was created which described the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and informed consent. The interviewer coordinated a time and date for the interview directly with the respondent and emailed them a Zoom link once the date and time are set.
During the interview, the researcher again reviewed the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and informed consent prior to beginning the interview. The interviewee was informed once again that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. They were informed when the recording began and ended. At the end of each interview, the researcher thanked the interviewee for their time. The researcher asked if they would like to recommend anyone else that meets the criteria for our research study. The researcher collected name and contact information, if they provided anyone. The researcher got verbal permission from the interviewee to share with the contact that they recommended the person for the researcher to contact them. Each interviewee was sent a post-interview e-mail with a brief debriefing statement and thank you for their participation. In the e-mail there was a number included to a mental health resource, as well as the child abuse hotline number. As researchers, we recognize that time in foster care can be a traumatic experience and want to make sure our respondents had access to resources in the case of discomfort.

Protection of Human Subjects

Identities and responses of respondents were kept confidential. Each participant consented to being audio recorded prior to the start of the interview and was provided with informed consent (Appendix B) through email or gave verbal consent at the start of interview. Audio recordings were stored electronically on password protected USB flash drives, as well as any electronic notes related to the study. During video recorded interviews cameras were off in
order to protect the identity of participants. Interviews were conducted in a private area where no other individuals can hear the interview taking place. At the beginning of the interview, the respondent confirmed they received the informed consent through email and gave verbal consent to continue the interview. At the end of the interview, respondents were emailed a debriefing statement with mental health resources (Appendix D) Three years after the study has been completed, all electronic data related to study will be deleted.

Data Analysis

The responses and data gathered in the interviews were analyzed with the goal of identifying themes, challenges, and barriers to mental health utilization by former foster youth. The interview included mostly open-ended questions that resulted in responses that may be specific to the individual.

Demographic information was collected from seven (7) interviewees. The demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide a profile of the respondents. Responses and data were sorted into the different themes and subthemes as they arose. Category names were assigned to each theme and subtheme that emerged. Identification of relationships between themes were identified. Then, the categories were refined and reorganized as deemed appropriate. The categories were then organized by themes for presentation.
Summary

The study sought to uncover utilization of mental health services amongst former foster youth in postsecondary education. This study is best suited for qualitative analysis, as the researchers were looking for individual representation of experiences. Individual interviews allowed respondents to answer freely and allowed researchers to capture main thoughts and ideas in relation to the topic. By collecting these unique experiences, the goal was to identify commonalities amongst the population.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, we have provided an outline of information gathered from former foster youth that previously attended or who are currently attending a college or university. The responses provided by these individuals were evaluated and compared to one another. Themes that arose through qualitative interviews are outlined below. In addition, demographic information was obtained from all the participants, and it has been outlined on table 2 below.

Data Analysis

Seven self-identified former foster youth participated in this research study. Demographic questions pertaining to age, sex, ethnicity, marital status, and post-secondary education, as well as demographic questions relating to time spent in foster care were asked. Participants ranged in age from 21-49 years of age. Four of the participants identified as female and three identified as male. Three of the respondents identified as Hispanic, two as African American, one as mixed (Filipino/Black/Mexican/French), and one unknown. Four of the respondents were married and three were single.

Regarding post-secondary education one respondent was in the process of getting their bachelor's degree, six respondents had bachelor's degree, four respondents had master's degrees, one respondent was in process of obtaining
law degree, and one respondent had a PhD. The time spent in foster care ranged from four years to thirteen years. Number of placements ranged from one to fourteen. The programs respondents were involved in while in foster care included family reunification, permanent placement, legal guardianship, adoption, probation, and extended foster care. Table 1 listed below demonstrates demographic information.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Sample (N=7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<table>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<p>| Education |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Reunification</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Placement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Foster Care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Guardianship</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
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<th>Number of Placements</th>
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<td>Under 6</td>
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<td>Over 6</td>
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<table>
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<th>Number of Years in Foster Care</th>
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<tr>
<td>Under 7</td>
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<td>Over 7</td>
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Scaling Questions

To gauge overall mental health in relation to postsecondary education, researchers asked participants a few scaling questions to determine an average number. Respondents were asked, on a scale of 1-10 how stressed or overwhelmed do you feel, or did you feel in regards to school and your education? The average answer was 4.8. The second question was, on a scale of 1-10, how important is it for former foster youth to seek mental health services? The average answer was 9.5.

Themes

Within the data that was collected, the researchers identified recurring themes in relation to mental health utilization and postsecondary education of former foster youth. The prevalent themes are as follows: 1) mental health utilization, 2) mental health symptoms, 3) needs of former foster youth in post-secondary education and 4) effective interventions.

Results of Themes

Mental Health Utilization

Former foster youth were interviewed and asked to speak about their own personal experiences regarding mental health. They were also asked about recommendations they would give for other foster youths regarding mental health stability while participating in a postsecondary education. Everyone interviewed agreed that mental health services should be a part of each former foster youth’s
experience while attending post-secondary education. They agreed that former foster youth would benefit from the utilization of these services, especially as they make their way through college life as an adult.

Participant 6 shared that mental health issues do not go away when they are adults and should be continuously worked on.

Very important because just having my friends alone that were also in foster care at some point in their lives, I can see that we kind of like suffer a lot of the same kind of like mental health illnesses like anxiety was one of big ones (Participant 6, March 2022).

Participants 6 and 4 shared that memories can and do come back and seeking therapy or counselling can help with learning skills to cope with these memories.

I think it’s important because you know, memories come back, and it’s gonna have some type of effect on you and I guess what they call adverse childhood experiences. I think is important because it can eliminate some of the factors like, you know, depression (Participant 5, February 2022).

It is very important because I understand that not everyone can take what they’ve gone through as well as I can or people have been through much worse than me. So, it’s very important for students, especially foster youth students to seek those opportunities and be given those opportunities (Participant 7, March 2022).
And finally, participant 1 shared that continued growth in the area of emotional intelligence is an ongoing skill that should be fostered and exercised in order to practice and improve the ability to cope with life challenges.

“I think counselling is important. Your brain and your emotions are like a muscle, the more you condition it the better you learn to cope with your emotions” (Participant 1, February 2022).

When participants were asked if they have participated in counselling/therapy services in the past, everyone responded, yes. However, the opposite was true when they were asked if they currently participate in services.

Participants described that although they experienced services in the past, they did not see a need for services today. Although they believe that former foster youth in college would benefit from services, they themselves do not participate in services. Participant 6 stated that they feel they benefited from services and currently no longer require the services. “It’s definitely way better than it used to be when I was like say in high school, or just like 19 or 20, because I’ve had therapy” (Participant 6, March 2022). They also mentioned a bad impression with counseling and believe that finding the right therapist is key to benefiting from counselling. “I think you have to find a therapist that you connect with, because the first one I had I think she was like falling asleep while speaking with her” (Participant 6, March 2022). No, I don’t feel that I needed it, I am positive. Most of the time, I don’t fall into any kind of depression states” (Participant 4, February 2022).
And finally, participant 2 stated they have too busy of a schedule to participate in services. Being “too busy” was a common response among the participants. I do not right now, I am too busy” (Participant 2, March 2022).

When asked if former foster youth attending college would benefit from the utilization of mental health services, most of the participant said, yes. In addition, most believe there are long term benefits from seeking and participating in services. Participant 6 expressed that being able to process past trauma would be helpful.

I’ve been able to just become self-aware of a lot of my trauma. Accept it and it’s just kind of like overcome like what I've gone through, overcome a lot of it. I guess you can say like what I’ve gone through and so I think that’s my mental health just being able to process the trauma (Participant 6, March 2022).

Participant 6 stated that being able to manage mental health diagnoses would have prevented them from having difficulties while attending college.

Yes, because I see mental health as important as your physical health. So, if you know mental health isn't doing that good, I feel like that’s going to play a part eventually in your success. I think I was able to manage my anxiety and I was able to stick through completing education versus if I didn’t manage it (Participant 6, March 2022).

Participant 3 expressed how unmanaged mental health or flash backs can come at inopportune times. For instance, when a former foster youth is in school, and
this can affect their performance and academic standing. “Everyone has some sort of trauma, and it can come back to haunt you. I believe everyone could benefit from some mental health services because at the end of the day we all have something that might be lingering” (Participant 3, April 2022).

**Mental Health Symptoms**

Respondents were asked questions pertaining to mental health currently, but most questions were geared towards mental health during their postsecondary education experience. In regard to stress, there were several respondents who found the transition into post-secondary education stressful.

There’s a lot of external pressure on me to graduate because of all the opportunities that have been given to me, so I do get stressed. If I fail a class or my grades aren’t doing too well or like you know big exams. But I did feel like that’s typical stress for a student especially in college because we’re here, we’ve been given opportunities (Participant 7, March 2022). Another participant noted, “It was stressful but that’s on everyone, you know. It’s hard to say but you know you got to have a drive to want to get out” (Participant 5, February 2022).

The reasons why respondents found themselves in stressful situations varied and did not necessarily relate to the educational component of college. There were aspects that surfaced such as forming healthy relationships and family support that were considered stressors. Several respondents reported having some type of distress in regard to relationships. Participant 2 stated, “When I had
that gap between graduating high school and starting college, I wasn’t feeling secure and was not stable, then I got to college. I just couldn’t form healthy relationships and I found myself in crisis again” (Participant 2, March 2022). The lack of connection and relationship also proved to be a stressful factor for Participant 5 who stated:

I think the most stressful probably been like when there’s family events, you know. Not connecting with friends. I guess those things are more stressful. I think about when I graduated, and I don’t think anyone in my family attended. You know those things know of like were met with distress. So, it’s like family not going to games, you play a game but no one is there, nothing ”( Participant 5, February 2022).

There were also a few respondents who explained that anxiety was an underlying cause of distress throughout their post-secondary education experience.

I think, at the time it was stressful, because I was still working through my anxiety. So I got anxiety because I would stress about everything. So, everything was stressful. Now that I’ve learned to cope with my anxiety and stress, things are no longer as overwhelming. (Participant 6, March 2022)

Another participant noted, “I think people have testing anxiety like that. I used to kind of have that like really really bad” (Participant 2, March 2022).
Mental health symptomatology can reveal itself in several different ways. Some of the respondents expressed issues that surfaced for them relating to distress during respondent’s post-secondary educational experience. These experiences were unique to the individual respondent, but worth noting as they relate to the topic of mental health. One respondent discussed having panic attacks related to anxiety and another respondent discussed having symptoms of an eating disorder. “I was actually having panic attacks had maybe like 2 and that’s when I had to seek therapy, because I realized I didn’t know how to manage my stress as well as I thought.” (Participant 6, March 2022)

Another participant noted,

So, I use to be 300lb and when I was losing weight, I got to a point where okay, if I don’t eat the weight will come off faster. It’s like one plus one equals two, its common sense right because we know it’s bad for us. So that’s what I was doing, although it was unhealthy, I had to seek help for that. (Participant 3, April 2022).

Needs of Former Foster Youth

Participants were asked to identify needs or gaps in the services already available to former foster youth attending college. They concluded that there were gaps in the programs currently offered. Among those gaps identified was the need for a robust mentoring program. The ideal mentoring program would help encourage the completion of graduation for former foster youth attempting to
complete a bachelor’s degree. Also, more financial help is needed to help support this population. And finally, supportive relationships are key.

Some of the gaps that were identified by the research were that universities should know exactly who the former foster youths are attending their university. This would enable the institutions to follow up with the students and provide information on services and supports available to them. A participant noted, “I say that colleges and universities should be aware of which kids are foster kids because they’re thrown out there to sink or swim” (Participant 5, February 2022).

Several respondents noted that they were not aware of programs available to them like Guardian Scholars. This suggests that more should be done to bring this knowledge to former foster youth attending a university. “Emphasize programs like Guardian’s Scholars more” (Participant 6, March 2022). Later in the interview, the same participant noted, “More help in connecting foster youth in high school to services” (Participant 6, March 2022). Finally, a third participant noted, “I wish I had more people telling me that I could go to college” (Participant 3, April 2022).

The participants identified the need for mentorship for former foster youth attending college. The ideal mentorship program should be a peer that is in the same school within the university. Feeling that the mentor is relatable is very important to this population. Participant 4 noted, “Try to get some of these kids to
feel comfortable enough to come in and get the services because there's a lot of free support” (Participant 4, February 2022).

Participant 7 emphasized the need for a mentor.

Having a mentor or some sort of person they could go to, maybe around the same age that they could go to. That has experienced this situation. That can push them along the right path. Maybe someone that had like specializes in that mentorship position. Just that idea of like that support with other people going through the same thing as you and reducing the stress because of that because you can talk to them about it. Someone who’s in the foster youth system who’s doing the degree that you are doing or in just in the general area (Participant 7, March 2022).

The research identified a strong need for financial help. The financial needs identified were housing, scholarships, loan forgiveness and grants. These are needed to help ease the stress of attending college. It would also make it more likely that that former foster youth might increase the likelihood of completing and earning their bachelor's degrees. In addition, respondents stated that they did not get many financial supports while they attended college. For example Participant 4 stated, “Helping kids with their housing situation whether it's going to be on campus or off campus. Find resources or a way to be somewhere to live somewhere I mean” (Participant 4, February 2022). Statements about financial needs and need for financial support also included, “I owe a lot of student loans” (Participant 4, February 2022). “Money, scholarships” (Participant
The respondents identified stable relationships as a need. Foster youth can become estranged from their biological families while they are in foster care, especially moving from placement to placement. Former foster youth end up in college without any positive adults in their lives that will guide and encourage them and support them as they transition into college life. Participant 4, for example, noted,

But I didn’t have any support and I had like absolutely no one, I had to fend for myself. The foster mother basically told me you got to. She sat me down in March and told me I’ve got three months to make a plan to save as much money as you can and find some place to go because I’m going to need that bed (Participant 4, February 2022).

Other statements in this area included, “Sometimes foster youth may not have like you know connections with family as much” (Participant 5, February 2022), and “Most foster youth don’t have like someone, or they can be like I feel comfortable going to this person to see you know like you don’t have your parents there and then just really don’t have the guide” (Participant 6, March 2022).

Effective Interventions

One aspect of this study that was of importance for the researchers was what respondents felt actually helped them through this point in their lives. When
asked questions pertaining to support and interventions that were important during their experience in postsecondary education, respondents explained programs geared towards foster youth and financial support were most beneficial. Here are two examples of participants that used programs to support them through postsecondary education.

So, one thing that helped me a lot is I got this scholarship with ‘Together we Rise’ and what was also provided other than financial help was a support system, because they group you with other kids that are in the same position as you, and it’s nice to see other students or other foster youth that are going through the same thing that you have, or have gone through and see them succeed, as well (Participant 7, March 2022)

“I was involved with the Renaissance College program on campus, it’s a foster youth program, and when I first came in, I was like ‘Oh, it’s just a program, whatever.’ But finding myself in these circumstances, and these challenges I was able to rely on that to kind of tone down (Participant 2, March 2022).

These programs geared towards former foster youth assist students in several ways. Outside of financial support, Renaissance scholars also assist with academic advising and needs for everyday life.

The EOP Renaissance Scholar’s Program. They made it so simple. Come in here we’re going to pick your classes. If you don’t have your classes picked, we’re going to pick them for you. They made sure I had food
cards. Gas cards. I’m talking about paying for my books and I never had to struggle with that. They pay for tuition pay for housing, so definitely (Participant 3, April 2022).

The researcher noted that several respondents also stated that having someone to talk to was beneficial whether in a formal or informal setting. This information can also be related to the effectiveness of having support in the form of relationships. “I call it community counseling. I use the people around me like I said to sometimes just release things, you know? (Participant 1, February 2022)

Having and knowing that other people are there with you, and kind of like, have that ability to also cope with that stress helps. Just the idea of like that support with other people going through the same thing as you and reducing the stress because of that, because you can talk to them about it. (Participant 5, February 2022)

Professional mental health support is a concept that many of our respondents were familiar with. However, only one respondent mentioned therapy as a form of support and help during the post-secondary experience. “I relied on therapy and making sure I was consistent, and then just taking advantage of the sessions, and you know, actually putting in the work and reflecting later. So, it was very beneficial.” (Participant 2, March 2022).

Summary

This chapter outlined data collected through the qualitative interview process. Data was gathered and presented in a way to show common themes
amongst the participants responses. Demographic information was also provided and demonstrated in way of a table. The themes identified in the data were mental health utilization, mental health symptoms, needs of former foster youth in post-secondary education, and effective interventions. These themes were common among the participants in relation to the utilization of mental health services among former foster youth in postsecondary education.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the results from the qualitative research that asked the question, to what degree former foster youth who are or have pursued post-secondary education take advantage of mental health services. The four major themes that were identified as a result of the initial research were mental health, barriers to mental health services, challenges in independent living skills, and former foster youth in college. In this chapter, the data collected will be discussed along with the initial themes of research. In addition, the limitations and strengths of our study will be discussed.

Mental Health

In chapter two of our literature review, the research found mental health stability is critical to overall wellbeing and academic success (Miller, Blakeslee, & Ison, 2000). Trauma experienced in foster care during childhood is connected to mental health conditions that can affect a person into adulthood (Courtney et al. 2007; Jones, 2014; Miller, Blakeslee, & Ison, 2020, Pecora et al., 2009). This was consistent with our findings, with four out of the seven participants acknowledging that they are a work in progress and continue to work on their mental health. Although none of our participants are currently in mental health services, all acknowledged the importance of these services.
Some of the challenges that this population face is their ability to overcome difficulties that arise as stress increases. In cases where they are faced with situations that may require the guidance from a caring adult. Former foster youth may lack ability to overcome obstacles (White et al., 2011). As this population is faced with the pressures of university life and distance themselves from mental health services, their mental health diagnosis may become more difficult to manage and this could in turn affect other areas of their life. Former foster youth residing in California are more likely to have a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse disorder than the general population (Thompson, Stevenson Wojciak, & Cooley, 2018).

Barriers to Mental Health Services

As previously stated in chapter 2, according to research there is a significant reduction in utilization of mental health services when former foster youth enter adulthood. Research identified this reduction as a barrier to mental health services. Reduced utilization of mental health services among former foster youth is connected to former foster youths not seeing benefits from services, fatigue from services during childhood (Piel & Lacasse, 2017), and perceived service quality (Villagrana, 2018). The present study revealed similar findings in regards to this research. All seven of respondents who participated in this study were not currently participating in mental health services, which aligns with the research regarding the decline.
According to research, lack of quality and appropriate services is a big concern for children in foster care (Villagrana, 2018; White, 2015). This is a concern that carries into adulthood in regards to obtaining quality care in regards to mental health. Contrary to what research stated, the majority of respondents acknowledged services were helpful to them in the past. Six out of seven respondents recognized that they did benefit from participating in mental health services. Reasons for not actively participating in services varied. Three of the seven participants stated that they are too busy. Two participants stated that they believe they no longer need services and similar to what research states, one participant stated they did not believe mental health services benefitted them.

**Challenges in Independent Living Skills**

The research found that former foster youth lack independent living skills that would improve their ability to have better outcomes as they become adults and leave foster care. Former foster youth do not feel ready at 18 years old to become independent (Thompson et al., 2018). Some independent living skills that would benefit this population are in the areas of employment skills and ability to overcome difficulties with peers and coworkers. This population can lack employment finding skills, training, and interpersonal know how (White et al., 2011).

In addition, many former foster youth lose contact with biological family members and do not build significant relationships with positive peers and adults. They start postsecondary education with little to no one to reach out to for
support. Former foster youth experience minimal to no parental and family support to guide them and help develop the skills required for living independently (Kinarsky, 2017).

**Former Foster Youth in College**

In chapter two, research regarding former foster youth in college was presented. Information was gathered regarding the low rate of completion outcomes, with only 10% of this population earning a bachelor’s degree when they attend college (Rios & Rocco, 2014). There was also literature in regards to needs of former foster youth in college in areas such as academics, housing, food insecurity, support from peers, and overall access to the resources they need (Kinarsky, 2017). Five of the seven participants reported additional financial support would have been helpful during their time in college. Two of the seven respondents reported that programs that did exist were not emphasized enough and they were unaware of available resources.

In regards to their experience in postsecondary education, five out of seven respondents stated they found the transition stressful. When asked what factors would reduce this stress many of the same needs that have been identified in the literature surfaced. Three of the seven respondents stated academic based programs such as writing centers and tutors would have been helpful, along with foster youth specific based programs.

As previously identified, a recurring theme within participants was the need for supportive relationships. Research indicates relationships on campus
can be difficult to build which leads to a lack of supportive networks (Jones, 2014). Additionally, being a former foster youth there many times already exists a deficiency in maintaining stable relationships. Three out of seven respondents identified having some sort of personal support or relationship as a factor that would have helped during their transition to postsecondary education. Four out of seven respondents identified mentorship in particular as a factor that would be beneficial for this population during their educational journey. According to several respondents, having someone guide the student who has been through the same process would be extremely beneficial. It would provide the relationship support aspect, as well as assist with navigating the system.

Implications of Findings for Social Work Practice and Policy

Throughout the research of this project information was collected in regard to the utilization of mental health services of former foster youth in post-secondary education. The experiences of these individuals varied, but reflected common areas of struggle at several different levels. It is not new information that former foster youth are a vulnerable population and research shows effective interventions are lacking. Social work values are rooted in the concept of service, dignity and worth of a person, social justice, and importance of human relationships, among others. Social workers should be aware of the issues this population faces. The findings of this study along with those of others can serve social work practice, in that it identifies prevalent factors related to inequities that exist. This is beneficial in order to best serve the needs of this population.
Policy

Policy surrounding former foster youth is a fairly new topic. It wasn’t until 2012 that Assembly Bill 12 (A.B. 12) was passed in California, which is known as the Extended Foster Care bill. This bill allows young adults who were in the system an opportunity to remain in care until the age of 21 in order to improve outcomes of youth involved in the system (CA A.B. 12, 2010). Policy surrounding this population is a developing area and the more research that is conducted the more connections that can be made in order to elicit change. Some of the identified needs were in areas such as academic based and former foster youth specific programs at the college setting.

Future Research

In this specific study, the goal was to uncover patterns of mental health utilization among this population. When interpreting the research, it was found that former foster youth are in fact not utilizing mental health services once they enter adulthood, however the reasons behind this varies from what research has shown in the past. In order to further understand and expand on these findings, more information could be gathered on the connection between former foster youth who successfully completed a college education and those who attended, but did not complete. This type of comparative research would help uncover differences among the two groups and further elaborate on the findings. This research could be taken and used to implement policies on college campuses or even at high school levels to further prepare these youth for college. Programs
could be established that focus on healthy relationship building, mentorships, and mental health.

Strengths and Limitations

There were both strengths and limitations to presented in this research study. Researchers were aware of both aspects and how they could affect the outcome of data.

Strengths

The strengths of this research were that we were able to obtain organic responses from the participants by utilizing qualitative research methods. We had the ability to redirect questions during the interview process as new information emerged. Participants had the opportunity to be candid about their responses and provide detail if they desired. In addition, the demographic data of the participants is diverse both in the ethnicity and age range.

Limitations

The limitations that were identified in working with this population was the difficulty that was encountered in obtaining a large sample size of participants and lack of current experience with both foster care and college-based programs. In addition, we were able to interview only one former foster youth that was currently attending college.

In order to increase the sample size of current former foster youth, it would be beneficial to reach out to students on college campuses and the colleges
themselves. This would provide our findings an updated sample and likely increase the number of participants.

As mentioned, only one participant was currently in college. The other participants were no longer attending and several had more than 8 years out of college. Most of our sample size was from a past point of view. Several of our participants did not attend college at a time that provided them with additional services that are now available. For example, Extended Foster Care which provides extended financial and housing supports till the age of 21 years old. In addition, the program Independent Living Program (ILP) provides financial and adult skill building training and support. Our study and the literature we provided did not present or identify these and many other programs that are available today.

Summary

This research study aimed to uncover the utilization of mental health services among former foster youth in post-secondary education. Existing research regarding this population focused on overall mental health, barriers to mental health services, challenges in independent living skills, and outcomes of former foster youth in college. Through qualitative interviews the researchers were able to identify similarities and differences to current research. The findings of this study were applied in a way to be beneficial for social work practice, policy, and further research. Strengths and limitations were taken into account in order to provide a well-rounded data analysis.
APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION TOOL
Demographics survey

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your marital status?
5. What type of postsecondary education do you or did you attend? Community college, 4-year university, graduate school, trade school?
6. How long (how much time) did you spend in foster care?
7. How many placements did you have while in foster care?
8. What types of foster care programs were you involved in? Family Reunification, Permanent Placement, Extended Foster Care, Legal Guardianship, and/or Adoption?

Interview Guide for Former Foster Youth who are or have been in postsecondary education

1. How would you rate your overall mental health? Why?
2. Do you participate in mental health services, such as counseling or therapy? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever participated in mental health services in the past? If yes, did you find it beneficial? If yes, why? If not, why?
4. Did you find the transition into post-secondary education stressful or overwhelming?
5. On a scale of 1-10 how stressed or overwhelmed do you feel or did you feel in regards to school and your education? What would it take for the number to go down?

7. Are there any factors that you feel would have been helpful during your transition to post-secondary education? What are they and why would they have been helpful?

8. Do you believe that mental health is related to successful completion of college? Why or why not?

9. What aspects experiencing foster care do you believe impacted your educational outcomes? Why?

10. If you could change anything that would improve the educational outcomes for foster youth, what would you change? Why?

11. On a scale of 1-10 how important is it for former foster youth to seek mental health service? Why?

12. In your opinion, what can colleges and Universities improve to encourage utilization of mental health services by former foster youth?

13. Is there any other service or support that you believe would work better to increase the likelihood of former foster youth in completing their bachelor's degree? Why?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the extent to which former foster youth attending college utilize mental health services, our study focuses on adults who are either currently attending college or have attended college and who are former foster youth. The study is being conducted by Liliana Lua and Jacqueline Viadas, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Armando Barragán, Associate 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 determine to what extent former foster youth in college utilize mental health services.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked questions based on mental health, utilization of mental health services, transition to post-secondary education, and general questions in regards to educational attainment.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to take part in the study or discontinue your participation at any moment without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses and identity will remain confidential, as well as data collected.

DURATION: It will take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: There are minimal risks during the interview. Although not likely, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

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.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Barragán at (909) 537-3501 or abarragan@csusb.edu.

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 2023

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

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 X here is you consent

Date
APPENDIX C

SOLICITATION EMAIL/TEXT
Hello,

We are Liliana Lua and Jacqueline Viadas, and we are second year MSW students at Cal State University San Bernardino. We have received approval from the School of Social Work at CSUSB to ask for voluntary participation in the study we are conducting. We are currently researching the utilization of mental health services of former foster youth in post-secondary education.

If you are a former foster youth and are currently in college or university or have graduated, we would greatly appreciate your participation. Please respond back to this email with the best method of contact. Participants will remain confidential. Thank you!

Hi _____!

I am currently working on my research project for the MSW program at CSUSB, with my research partner Liliana Lua/Jacqueline Viadas. My research is in regards to the utilization of mental health services amongst former foster youth in post-secondary education. Would you be willing to participate? We would greatly appreciate it! Let me know and I can send you details. Thank you!
Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in our research study relating to the usage of mental health services amongst former foster youth in post-secondary education. We greatly appreciate your time and honesty. As researchers, we recognize that time in foster care could be a traumatic experience for our respondents. If you experienced any discomfort in regards to any of the questions during the interview, we have provided a number to mental health resources within San Bernardino County, as well as the child abuse hotline number.

San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health 1-888-743-1478

Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-827-9233

Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Liliana Lua, Jacqueline Viadas or Dr. Armando Barragan Jr. at abarragan@csusb.edu.
APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL
January 16, 2022

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-75

Armando Barragan Jr, Jacqueline Viadas, Liliana Lua
CSBS - Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Armando Barragan Jr, Jacqueline Viadas, Liliana Lua:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Former Foster Youth and the Usage of Mental Health Services in Post-Secondary Education" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research-related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's COVID-19 Prevention Plan for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRRP) 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. The Cayuse IRB System will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- 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 mgillespie@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-75 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,

Nicole Dabbs
Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
REFERENCES

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=200920100AB12


https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325012445833


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

Liliana Lua and Jacqueline Viadas contributed to this Research Project equally.