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## EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

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EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS  
TO AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

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

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

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by  
Ericka D. Ross  
Aida N. Justiz-Skipper  
May 2023

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May 2023

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## ABSTRACT

Background: There is a need for an enhanced understanding of factors contributing to foster youths' decision to leave the foster care system prematurely and not participate in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program given California has the largest population of non-minor dependents in care and a very small percent of transitioning foster youth participating in the EFC program. Purpose: This study examined the factors that impact a youth's decision to participate in EFC and strived to answer the following question: Is there an association between the social worker-client relationship and a foster youth's knowledge of EFC? Methods: This quantitative study use an observational Cross-sectional design to gather data from foster youth. The method of sampling used was non-probability with convenience, purposive, and snowball type. Participant's demographic characteristics were gathered along with data on the participants bond and collaboration on goals and tasks with their assigned social worker. Descriptive statistics were generated for the sample. In addition two independent sample t-test were conducted to determine whether level of bond and collaboration with the assigned worker varied between participants with and without knowledge of EFC. Results: Ten participants who are currently or were formally youth under the supervision of a County Child Welfare agency were recruited. These were mostly individuals in their mid-20s and mostly female. Findings revealed that 100% of participants have knowledge of the EFC. Among these participants 40% had considered or applied to the EFC program. The

difference, however, was not statistically significant. The level of collaboration with their assigned social worker did not differentiate between those with and without the knowledge of EFC. Conclusion: The findings presented in this study likely provide important insights for County Child Welfare agencies as it relates to the importance of youth receiving the knowledge to be fully informed of their rights to the EFC program.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my children Daijoany(Nature) Mitchell, Ernest Mitchell III, Maliya Ross, Mister Ross, Norine Mitchell and finally my baby boy Chase Ballou, for your love and support during a rough year, and to all who have been on this journey with me (you know who you are). I would also like to thank my partner in crime Aida Justiz-Skipper, I could not have done this without you. Finally, to my professor Dr. Lim for your support and encouragement. Thank you.

~Ericka Ross

I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my husband who has supported me in every way through my education journey and my daughter who has been ever so patient with my availability, my classmates who can identify with this journey's struggle and lifted me up when needed, my research partner who worked tirelessly with me throughout this process, Dr. Lim who was available and present every step of the way, and finally all of my professors and mentor who listened to my griping and encouraged me throughout my education journey.

~Aida Justiz- Skipper

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CHAPTER ONE  
EXAMINING THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO  
AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Introduction

Research has examined the benefits of the Extended Foster Care program (EFC). In particular, CalYouth (2019) and the Midwest (2001) studies have investigated the outcomes of young adults who are 18 and older, under the foster care umbrella, who are transitioning to adulthood. In general, studies have found that youth who participate in the EFC obtain a higher level of education, are more likely to be gainfully employed, and are better prepared to overcome the barriers to becoming self-sufficient. Despite the EFC program's benefits (or effectiveness), not all eligible foster youth are taking advantage of this resource. Approximately less than 10% of eligible foster youth have participated in the EFC program (Child Welfare Indicator Project, n.d.). One of the reasons may be when a foster youth comes into the age of majority, which was 18 in most states; they do not wish to be governed by formal supervision.

There is a need for an enhanced understanding of factors contributing to foster youths' decision to leave the foster care system prematurely and not participate in the EFC program. This research topic is essential to pursue as studies have shown the outcomes are often poor for youth who prematurely age out of the foster care system (Loring, 2019).

This chapter describes the adverse outcomes of youth who do not utilize extended foster care services and proposes how better service delivery results can be provided.

## Foster Care

Foster care is a temporary out-of-home-care setting such as a relative, non-relative, emergency shelter, or pre-adoptive home for children and non-minor dependents who have experienced abuse or neglect by their parents and need to receive out-of-home care. While children are placed in foster care, the local state agency is responsible for their care until it is safe to reunite with the biological parents or the child reaches the age of majority. Once a minor reaches the age of majority, the minor is considered a transitioning youth and, in California, can exit or remain in foster care until age 21. According to the most recent federal data, more than 400,000 children in foster care are in the United States (AdoptUSKids, 2022). As of 2019, there were a total of 27,407 foster youth in care in California, of which 3,650 youths were aged out or emancipated, and 7,358 were non-minor dependents who remained in the foster care system past the age of 18 (Child Welfare Indicator Project, n.d; see Figure 1).

There are two ways a child can enter foster care. The first is through substantiated child abuse or neglect. At this point, the County Supreme Court-Juvenile Division determines it is in the best interest to remove the child from their parent's care to protect them from further abuse and neglect. The child then becomes a temporary ward of the Juvenile Court. The second is by way of a

parent's voluntary relinquishment. A parent can legally surrender a newborn baby or child the parent is finding it difficult to care for, such as a child with disabilities or challenging behaviors.

The amount of time a child may spend in foster care varies and depends upon the ability to successfully reunify with the biological parents or if a permanency plan is implemented via legal guardianship or adoption (Font & Gershoff, 2020). A primary goal of the foster care system for all youth is to achieve permanency.

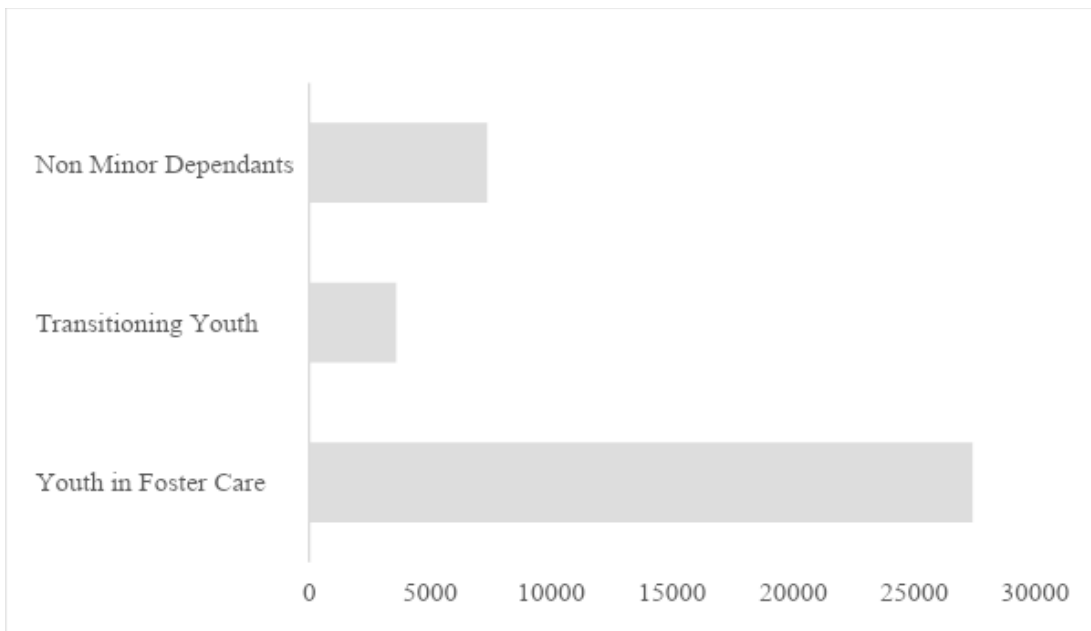


Figure 1. Number of Foster Youths in California in 2019.

*Note.* Transitioning youth can be defined as those 18 years of age and moving to self-sufficiency. Non-minor dependents can be defined as youth between the ages of 18 through 21 and under the foster care umbrella.

Child welfare workers have long debated whether a youth is ready to transition independently to adulthood at 18, and anecdotal case information over the last several years indicates that youth who become the majority are taking longer to prepare for adulthood. Child welfare workers contend that minors who become of age in the foster care system do not have the same family connections as those who are not in the foster care system. This provides less support for the minors when they are attempting to navigate how to become a successful adult, making the transition to adulthood more challenging. Longitudinal research studies across several states have shown youth who age out of the foster care system at the age of 18 years old and who do not have ongoing support are less likely to pursue higher education or employment and are more likely to experience teen pregnancy or homelessness, and engage in criminal activity (Font & Gershoff, 2020). Further, they are more prone to unstable housing, economic hardships, and mental health issues (Courtney and Culhane et al., 2011).

### The Evolution of the Foster Care System

Up until 1983, California laws did not recognize the period after youth exited foster care through emancipation. Thus, the child welfare agencies did not offer services to these youth past the age of majority, resulting in no secondary education. If they pursue secondary education, they do not reach graduate status due to dropout, no connection to the labor force, work an unskilled job and are paid low wages, are more likely to receive government assistance, and

experience homelessness. In addition, said youth experienced higher pregnancy rates and were more likely to engage in criminal activity (Jones, 2019).

Recognizing the challenges faced by former foster youths, the federal government implemented a succession of interventions. In 1983, the Department of Health and Human Services announced a request for a proposal titled *A Study of Adaptation of Adolescents in Foster Care to Independence of Community Life*. This resulted in funding several Independent Living Programs in several states, including California (Jones, 2019). Then, the legislature gradually passed several acts directed toward foster youth until age 21. Assembly Bill (AB) 12 is the law that allow youth in California who leave as non-minor dependents to return to the program under EFC as long as they meet the criteria of the EFC program. These legislations allowed increased funding for programs to better prepare youth aging out of the foster care system to transition successfully to adulthood (Jones, 2019). One of the foremost federal interventions for non-minor dependent youth—those between 18 to 21 years of age who remain in the foster care system—exiting foster care prematurely is the EFC program.

#### Extended Foster Care Program

The EFC program was created under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 to improve foster youth' outcomes (Courtney & Okpych, 2018). The Act recognized that youth 18 years of age and in the foster care system are vulnerable individuals who are primarily unprepared to transition to adulthood and need a longer preparation period (Jones, 2019). As

such, the Act allows foster youth to stay in care past 18 by enrolling in the EFC program. The terms of the program specify the need for participating non-minor dependents to pursue secondary education, secure gainful employment at the minimum duration of 80 hours per month, and participate in training addressing barriers to employment (Courtney & Okpych, 2018). Research has documented the effectiveness of the Extended Foster Care program.

In addition to the EFC program, the Act allotted funds to bolster other support available to eligible foster youth. For example, a non-minor dependent is eligible for independent living services while transitioning to adulthood. Independent living services consist of assistance in securing housing, pursuing education and employment, and leisure activities while transitioning to adulthood. Non-minor dependents were also eligible to receive extended Medi-cal, tuition assistance or a waiver for a public university, and federal grants for post-secondary education (Courtney & Okpych, 2018). Thus, when a non-minor dependent experiences difficulty, resources are in place to guide the youth to stabilization (Children Bureau, 2022). The Act also requires the assigned county social worker to collaboratively identify needs, set goals, and create a transitional plan with the non-minor dependent within 90 days of their 18th birthday. Once this is accomplished, the assigned social worker serves as a liaison between the non-minor dependent and service providers to ensure the youth's needs are met, and a successful transition to independence is supported. This directive, therefore, holds the non-minor dependent accountable for meeting the



requirements of the EFC program while utilizing support and pursuing independence. Collectively, the Act ensures that sufficient and appropriate resources are in place to guide foster youth to stabilization should they experience difficulty as they transition (Children Bureau, 2022).

### Conclusion

California has the largest population of non-minor dependents in care. It is one of the early states to adopt the policy option to extend EFC through the age of 21 for non-minor dependents. However, less than 10% of transitioning foster youth participate in EFC (Child Welfare Indicator Project, n.d.). Understanding the factors that influence a youth's decision to participate in the program will allow County Child Welfare agencies to better serve youth who are transitioning to adulthood.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews research studies to answer two broad questions. First, do transitioning youths participating in Extended Foster Care (EFC) demonstrate more positive outcomes than those not participating? Second, what factors influence foster youths' decision to participate in the EFC program?

Research has found that youth participating in EFC receive higher education, are less likely to become teen parents, are less likely to become homeless because they have support, and are less likely to become incarcerated (Courtney & Okpych, 2019). Furthermore, research has found adverse outcomes directly associated with denying the EFC program. These adverse outcomes include homelessness, lower education attainment, poor mental health, engagement in substance abuse, early pregnancy, and criminal justice involvement (Jones, 2019).

#### Outcomes of EFC Participation

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in youth participating in EFC. The attributes are unknown. Several studies, like CalYouth (Courtney & Okpych, 2019) and the Midwest Study (Courtney & Okpych, 2019) have tried to identify the effects of EFC and the impact of EFC. In general the studies have found that EFC resulted in higher levels of education, stability in living situation,

and are less likely to engage in criminal activity (Font & Gershoff, 2020). The main objective of the CalYOUTH study is to evaluate California's EFC act on youth's outcomes. California's Assembly Bill 12 (AB-12), passed in 2010 and was effective January 1, 2012, raised the minimum age for foster care from 18 to 21, making it one of the first states to implement the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions statute. The CalYOUTH Study is important as within the United States one in six foster adolescents who are 16 or older live in California (Webster et al., 2013). Additionally, California's foster care system is county-ran, and there is a lot of variety across the 58 counties in terms of demographic makeup, urbanization, and the organization and application of child welfare laws (Courtney, Park, & Okpych, 2017). The CalYOUTH Study was recently extended to 2020 from its initial five-year plan, which aimed to be completed by 2017. Data from the CalYOUTH Study comes from three main sources; one of which is administrative data from both public and private sources are included in the first source. Over 113,000 children who spent at least eight days in California foster care on or after their 16th birthday between January 2006 and December 2017 are presently included in the administrative data sample. The longitudinal youth study allows us to assess the impact of EFC on a wider range of outcomes than those available in the administrative data. The CalYouth study found that participation in EFC increased the probability that the youth completed a high school credential by 8% and their expected probability of enrolling in college by 5-12% (Courtney et. al, 2021).

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth study allows exploration of potential mechanisms of how extended care impacts outcomes (Courtney et al., 2004). The Midwest study (Courtney & Okpych, 2019) found evidence that youth in EFC utilize mental health services more often than those who leave care to live independently (Jones, 2019). The study indicated an increase in high school completion, enrollment in secondary education, and a youth's monetary status. The youth in this study also described a professional as a source of social support.

According to the Child Welfare Indicator Project (Needell et. al. 2013) as of April 2016, 7,575 non-minor dependents were participating in the EFC program in California. As of April 2022, there were 7,287 non-minor dependents in care in California. Due to the decrease in numbers, there have been efforts to evaluate the use of the EFC program, which yielded evidence attesting to the program's effectiveness (Needell, et. al. 2013).

While the EFC program is effective, it is noteworthy that there is significant variation in youth's length of participation. Previous studies have shown the support of county court personnel for EFC is an essential predictor of youths' length of stay per Rosenberg, 2019. Some of the differences in EFC length of stay may also be attributed to other county-level contextual factors that influence the availability of services (e.g., housing costs) and the ability and desire of youth to meet the eligibility criteria for remaining in care (e.g., labor market conditions) (Courtney et. al., 2020).

## Factors Influencing Participation

Research has focused on the outcomes of youths in the EFC program, and less has been done to identify the factors that impact a foster youth's decision to participate in EFC. This smaller body of research has found that not all transitioning youth utilize the EFC programs, and several factors impact a foster youth's decision to deny or accept EFC (Courtney & Okpych, 2018). One of the prominent factors is social support (Jones, 2019).

### Social Support

Social support has been named a "protective factor" for transitioning youth (Rosenberg, 2019). The loss of social relationships, and its effect on the youth's life trajectory in their early 20s, is one of the most important reasons for advocating for the extension of foster care support to at least the age of 21, if not later (Jones, 2019). Foster youth are at higher risk of homelessness, low education attainment, unemployment and early entry into parenthood, if they leave the foster care system without social support (Rosenberg, 2019). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if social support is present, youths are more likely to enroll in EFC.

However, how do we meet these non-minor dependents where they are and extend the invite in a more caring manner understanding their reservation for not wanting to extend their stay in foster care?

## Social Worker-Client Relationship

Several reasons contribute to youths leaving the foster care system without applying to the EFC program although an influential factor is the youth's experience with the foster care system. Some reasons youth leave care prematurely are a dislike of the system, a desire for independence or to change their circumstances, a lack of receiving promised services, and a weak connection with their assigned social worker. Some youth never develop a successful connection with their social worker due to mistrust related to their historical trauma with an adult who was responsible to meet their needs and care for them. It is commonly known that social support is crucial to one's well-being when going through a hardship or life transition (Greeson et. al, 2015). Social support has been shown to be a factor in resilience and a contributor to a youth's completion of high school as well as stable employment (Greeson et. al, 2015). In addition, studies have found those that have social support experience "less depressive symptoms", "less perceived stress", and "better physical health (Greeson et. al, 2015)." A social worker is someone who interacts with a foster youth at the minimum of once per month and has the opportunity to build rapport and trust with the foster youth, ultimately becoming a lifelong connection.

## Gaps and Limitations

Although the loss of social support is one of the pivotal reasons for referring a foster youth to the EFC program, previous research has not investigated if the social worker-client relationship is a contributing factor

to foster youths' decision to participate in the EFC program. This research topic is essential to pursue as studies have shown the outcomes are often poor for youth who prematurely age out of the foster care system (Loring, 2019). Hence, it is essential to understand what role the social worker-client relationship plays in a youth's decision to participate in the EFC program in order to be more effective in service delivery to transitioning youth in the foster care system.

### Study Objectives

This study examines the factors that impact a youth's decision to participate in EFC. This study will strive to answer the following question: Is there an association between the social worker-client relationship (knowledge and intention) and foster youth's decision to apply to EFC? Previous research has not investigated if social worker-client relationship is a contributing factor.

### Theory: Unified Theory of Behavior

Unified Theory of Behavior is relevant to understanding foster youth's decision to seek out services such as EFC or transitional housing, as the theory proposes that the social worker-client relationship is a succulent factor for understanding behaviors and influence. Per the Unified Theory of Behavior the help seeking behaviors can be examined and assist with the consideration of whether a youth's decision to accept EFC is related to their awareness of the related services and educational attainment (Lindsey et. al., 2012). When examining help seeking behaviors, it is important to consider the relationship

between skills and strategies and the quality of decision making. Individuals with less knowledge of EFC and skills to submit an application are less likely to apply. Social workers are the imparters of knowledge and skills necessary for foster youth to successfully apply for the EFC program. Social workers are also youths' "cue to action." For the above reasons, it is reasonable to focus on studying the social worker-client relationship in order to provide insight for the Child Welfare Agencies to increase effectiveness on service delivery to this population of youth. The proposed hypothesis was youth's with lower levels of bond with their assigned social worker have less knowledge and intention of applying to the EFC program.

#### Significance of Study

California is one of the states where EFC is offered. As previously stated, the CalYouth and Midwest studies have shown that it is beneficial for transitioning youth, as it provides additional support, such as independent living skills and housing, to transition to self-sufficiency successfully. Hence, it is essential to understand what role the social worker-client relationship plays in a youth's decision to participate in the EFC program in order to be more effective in service delivery to transitioning youth in the foster care system. Further, the benefits anticipated by addressing the questions above are to better prepare for independence, lessen the challenges transitioning youth encounter, and better tailor services to the unique needs of each transitioning youth.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Study Design

This quantitative study will use an observational cross sectional design to gather data from foster youth to determine if the social worker-client relationship is associated with a foster youth's acceptance of the Extended Foster Care Program (EFC). This research design was chosen due to time constraints and the ability to implement quickly at one point in time as well as the capacity to rule out certain threats to internal validity. The limitations of a cross sectional design is that it cannot infer causality due to the inability to establish a time sequence.

#### Setting

Prospective participants were chosen from youth who are or were associated with Children and Family Service (CFS) agencies across the Inland Empire by use of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and twitter. CFS is a family centered agency with a purpose of reducing safety risk to children, improving parenting skills, and strengthening social support for families. This agency was identified for study involvement because they serve foster youth between the ages of 18-25.

## Participants

Eligible youth will be between the ages of 18 and 25, of mixed ethnicity, and have been under the jurisdiction of the foster care system due to neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. Participants must be able to read and speak English as well as have been offered and/or eligible for the EFC program. Study participation was limited to youth who have been under the foster care jurisdiction within the last ten years. A brief pre-evaluation will be provided to a potential participant to determine whether they meet the criteria to continue on as a participant who will complete the survey.

## Recruitment

The method of sampling used will be non-probability with convenience, purposive, and snowball type. A screening questionnaire will be posted on social media as well as distributed within the Inland Empire's various County Child Welfare agencies in order to recruit prospective participants. Once it is established that the participant meets the study's criteria, informed consent is provided on the first page of the survey where the participant will have the option to check a box agreeing to participate in the study. The aimed target sample size is one hundred and twenty transitional foster youth.

## Study Procedures

Participants will complete a pre-questionnaire and a fifteen-minute self-reporting survey. Participants will participate voluntarily and will not be

compensated in any form upon completion of the survey. Data will be collected via Qualtrics. Questions posed will pertain to circumstances surrounding or influential factors for acceptance of the EFC program. The study protocol was approved by Cal State San Bernardino School of Social Work's IRB on December 13, 2022.

### Demographic Characteristics

Data on participants' age at the time of research participation, gender, race and ethnicity, living arrangement (living on your own, cohabitating and paying rent, transitional housing, shelter, and homeless), educational level (less than high school, high school graduate/GED, at least some college, completed college), and employment status (unemployed, employed but less than 20 hours per week, employed and more than 20 hours per week) will be gathered.

### Social Worker-Client Relationship

The social work-client relationship will be measured utilizing a validated 18-item measure developed by Cunningham et al. (2009) to measure service engagement among youth in residential treatment centers. This instrument assesses youths' readiness to change, bond with staff, and collaboration on goals and tasks through self-report. Only items measuring bond with staff and collaboration on goals and tasks will be used for this study. Participants will be invited to respond to 12 questions, for example, "I feel that the social worker here cares about me even when I do things that they do not approve of" and "The

social worker and I agree on what is important for me to work on." Each item is rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). This measure has been shown to have good psychometric properties (Cunningham et al., 2009).

### Participation in the EFC Program

Participation in the EFC program will be measured by asking participants if they have heard of the EFC program and whether they have considered accepting the program.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and range, frequencies, and percentages) were derived to describe the participant's demographic characteristics, level of bond with their assigned social worker, level of collaboration with their assigned social worker, and whether the participant had heard of and considered participating in the EFC program. To determine whether bond and collaboration level differed between those who have heard of EFC and those who have not heard of EFC, we conducted an independent samples t-test. Statistical significance was determined at  $p < .05$ . Analyses were performed with SPSS using data from participants with complete information.

Descriptive analyses were performed to yield summary statistics of participants' demographics (e.g., age, gender), the number of foster youth who have heard of the EFC program and have considered accepting the program,

and foster youths' bond, rapport, and collaboration with their social workers. Bivariate analysis (e.g., two independent-sample t-tests and Pearson's chi-square test of independence) were performed to examine the relationship between youths' relationship with their social worker measured through bond, rapport, and collaboration and their knowledge of the EFC program and whether they have considered accepting the program.

On average participants who have heard of the EFC program reported the same level of collaboration as the participants who have not heard of the EFC program, 2.2 ( $SD=.7$ ) versus 2.2 ( $SD=.8$ ), thus negating the need to perform an independent sample t-test.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study. Data was collected from individuals who have either participated in Extended Foster Care (EFC) or have heard about Extended Foster Care program within the last 10 years during our recruitment period ( $N = 10$ ). It was hypothesized that the social-work client relationship would positively correlate with the knowledge of the EFC program by the youth. During this study, the participants provided their knowledge about and acceptance of the EFC program. In the following sections of this chapter, the researchers present the participants' demographics characteristics, the non-minor dependents living situation, education attainment, and the correlation between participant's knowledge of EFC and the youth's intention to apply to EFC.

#### Descriptive Statistics

##### Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays the sample's demographics. The average age of each participant was reported to be ( $n=24.4, 4.3$ ). Females were the majority in this sample ( $n=8, 80.00\%$ ). When asked about ethnicity participants identified as African American ( $n=4, 40.00\%$ ), White as ( $n=3, 30.00\%$ ), and other as ( $n=3, 30\%$ ). Five participants identified as Hispanic (50.00%). The participants reported

their current living situation as living on their own ( $n=6$ , 60.00%), co-habituating and paying rent ( $n=3$ , 30.00%), and residing in transitional living as ( $n=1$ , 10.00%). Table 1 reflects participants living situation.

Participants overall had a higher level of education. When asked about level of education, participants with some college or above reported ( $n=6$ , 60.00%) and those that completed high school or a General Education Development (GED) test reported ( $n=4$ , 40.00%).

#### Social Worker-Client Relationship

A mean score was generated for the participant's responses to bond and collaboration with their assigned social worker. On average, the mean score reflecting participants bond with their assigned social worker was 3.1 ( $SD= 1.1$ , range= 3.5) and the mean score on items measuring collaboration, participants indicated that their collaboration with their assigned social worker was 2.2 ( $SD= 0.8$ , range= 2.0). These findings revealed that on average the participants did not have a high bond with their assigned social worker however, felt their assigned social worker did collaborate and/or team with them.

#### Extended Foster Care

The majority of participants reported that if they had the knowledge about the EFC program, they would consider applying. In the sample, half of participants reported ( $n=5$ , 100.00%) they had heard of EFC. Of those who heard of EFC ( $n=2$ , 40.00%) had considered applying for the program. Further, participants reported ( $n=2$ , 40.00%) were not averse to applying for the EFC

program. Findings revealed a need for County Child Welfare agencies to be more intentional about ensuring transitional foster youth receive EFC program information by another avenue other than through the assigned social worker. The study revealed that not being informed about the EFC program appears to be a barrier.

#### Group Comparison, Independent Samples T-Test

On average, participants who have heard of the EFC program reported higher levels of bond with their social worker compared to participants who have not heard of the EFC program, 2.8 ( $SD = 1.3$ ) versus 3.3 ( $SD = 1.0$ ). The result of the Levene's test for homogeneity of variance indicated that the variances for the two groups are not significantly different ( $F = 0.18, p = 0.68$ ). Results of the t- test assuming equal variance suggests that the group difference in bond level is not statistically significant,  $t(8) = -0.58, p = .58$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.43, 95%  $CI$  [-2.15, 1.28] is small (Cohen's  $d = 0.20$ ).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The aim of this cross-sectional study was to gather quantitative data on the factors that impact a youth's decision to participate in EFC. This study strived to answer the following question: Is there an association between the social worker-client relationship and foster youth's decision to apply to EFC? Data came from ( $N= 10$ ) foster youths recruited from the general population. The proposed hypothesis was youths who had poor relationships with their assigned social worker, measured by their perception of bond and collaboration, had less knowledge and intention of applying to the EFC program. Findings from this study revealed that on average those who have heard of the EFC program reported higher levels of bond with their assigned social worker. This finding, however, was statistically insignificant. Participants who have heard of the EFC program did not differ from participants who did not hear of the EFC in their perceived collaboration with their social worker. Therefore, the findings did not support the study's hypothesis.

Within this study higher mean scores indicated a lack of bonding and teamwork. Participants who had heard of the EFC program reported higher degrees of relationship with their social worker than those who had not heard of the EFC program, 2.8 (SD = 1.3) versus 3.3 (SD = 1.0). Despite the small amount of participants reporting a higher level of bond were also the participants who had the knowledge of EFC. While the quality of the social worker/client

connection will always have an impact on the procedures and outcomes of an intervention, the level of this influence will vary depending on the bond between social worker and client (Walsh, 2021).

This study's findings are inconsistent with the past study regarding youth and caseworker's perspectives wherein the results reflected the majority of participants had the knowledge, however they were not fully informed about the details of their obligations and rights as it relates to the EFC program (Napolitano et. al., 2015). The inconsistencies between this study (N=10) and past studies, of 800 participants or more may be related to the variance in sample size. The past study regarding Findings on the Relationship between Extended Foster Care and Youth's Outcomes at Age 23 revealed the majority of participants reported the need for more intensive support from the assigned social worker to stay in care, than what is currently being provided (Courtney et. al, 2021). This past study is consistent with this study in that the results revealed a correlation between bond and knowledge.

### Limitations

First, inclusion of participants was determined based on particular variables and data was collected all at once; the study was not longitudinal in nature. This quantitative study utilized an observational cross sectional design to gather data, thus causality or a cause and effect relationship between the dependent and independent variable could not be determined. Also temporal sequence could not be established due to the data in this study being captured at

a single point in time. Second, the study had limited generalizability due to the sample size ( $N=10$ ). Given the small sample size, the results of this study cannot be applied to a broader group.

Nonetheless, this study has certain strengths such as the age range of the participants. The youngest participant was 18 years of age and the oldest was 30 years of age, which provided a broad range of input from those who may be or have been a foster youth with the EFC program available to them. In addition, the social worker-client relationship was measured utilizing a validated 18-item scale developed by Cunningham et al. (2009). Given the measuring tool was validated, the reliability was also ensured.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the association between the social worker-client relationship (knowledge and intention) and foster youth's decision to apply to the EFC program. Findings revealed that between bond and collaboration, the former differed between those who heard of the EFC program and those who didn't hear. Further, Findings underscored that there is a need for the County Child Welfare agencies to be more intentional about informing youth concerning the EFC program other than through the assigned social worker. The study revealed that not being informed about the EFC program appears to be a barrier. Further, the study revealed that the social worker client relationship or bond is a factor in a youth's decision to apply for the EFC program, in that those who had a higher level of bond with their social worker were more informed about the EFC

program. Some suggestions to increase the bond between the assigned social worker and the client include continuity of the assigned social worker or to assign a different social worker if a bond does not appear to be established within the first two months. Lastly, in order to increase knowledge outside of the social worker client contact, the County Child Welfare agency could implement a focus group for youth, between the ages of 16.5 and 17.5, to educate them on the EFC program.

Given the study's small sample size, the findings should be considered preliminary; thus, replication with a larger sample will bolster this study's conclusion. In order to accomplish this, incentives that were not offered during this study could be implemented during an expansion study to increase the sample size. Lastly, an expansion study may include youth's placement during their 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> year of age as well as a yes or no question about a youth's desire to stay in care after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Determining youth's placement during their later years may assist with measures of support and inquiry about why the youth did or did not desire to stay in care may be beneficial to determine motivation.

Finally, the findings presented here likely provide important insights for Child Welfare agencies as it relates to the importance of youth receiving the knowledge to be fully informed of their rights to the EFC program.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL

Tuesday, February 28, 2023 at 13:49:30 Pacific Standard Time

**Subject:** IRB-FY2023-97 - Initial: IRB Admin./Exempt Review Determination Letter  
**Date:** Tuesday, December 13, 2022 at 10:15:43 AM Pacific Standard Time  
**From:** do-not-reply@cayuse.com  
**To:** Caroline Lim, justizskippera@coyote.csusb.edu, rosse1@coyote.csusb.edu  
**Attachments:** ATT00001.jpg



December 13, 2022

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination  
Status: Determined Exempt  
IRB-FY2023-97

Caroline Lim Aida Justiz-Skipper, Ericka Ross  
CSBS - Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Caroline Lim Aida Justiz-Skipper, Ericka Ross:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Understanding the Social Worker/ Client Relationship as it Relates to Participation in Extended Foster Care" 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 (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. 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 [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2023-97 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,

*King-To Yeung*

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

KY/MG

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL PROTOCOL CHANGE/MODIFICATION LETTER



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## IRB-FY2023-97 - Modification: IRB Approval Protocol Change/Modification Letter

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do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue, Feb 28, 2023 at 9:25 AM

To: Caroline.Lim@csusb.edu, justizsklippa@coyote.csusb.edu, rosse1@coyote.csusb.edu



February 28, 2023

### CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Protocol Change/Modification

IRB-FY2023-97

Status: Approved

Caroline LimAida Justiz-Skipper, Ericka Ross  
CSBS - Social Work  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Caroline Lim Aida Justiz-Skipper, Ericka Ross:

The protocol change/modification to your application to use human subjects, titled "Understanding the Social Worker/ Client Relationship as it Relates to Participation in Extended Foster Care" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A change in your informed consent requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Please ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study. A lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in your approval.

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 by submitting the appropriate form (modification, unanticipated/adverse event, renewal, study closure) through the online Cayuse IRB Submission System.

- 1. If you need to make any changes/modifications to your protocol submit a modification form as the IRB must review all changes before implementing them in your study to ensure the degree of risk has not changed.**
- 2. If any unanticipated adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research study or project.**
- 3. If your study has not been completed submit a renewal to the IRB.**
- 4. If you are no longer conducting the study or project submit a study closure.**

You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2023-97 in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*King-To Yeung*

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

KY/MG

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the social worker client relationship and its impact on a youth's decision to participate in the Extended Foster Care program. This study is being conducted by Ericka Ross and Aida Justiz-Skipper, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Caroline Lim, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** This study aims to explore the social worker-client relationship and its impact on a youth's decision to participate in the Extend Foster Care program.

**DESCRIPTION:** If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to provide information on yourself (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, educational level) and your knowledge of and experience with the Extended Foster Care program, and your relationship with your assigned child welfare social worker.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions. You can also freely withdraw from participation at any time. To do so, simply exit the survey. The alternative to participation is not to participate.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** We will be gathering anonymous data. This means we will not collect any information that will identify you (e.g., your name, social security number, contact information, video recording). We will present findings from this study in group format only so that no results will be connected to a participant. We will protect the data against inappropriate access by restricting data access to authorized study personnel. We will store the data on computers or laptops secured with individual ID plus password protection. Additionally, the folder containing the data will be protected with a password known to authorized study personnel. We will destroy the data three years after the project has ended.

**DURATION:** Your participation in the study will last approximately 15 to 20 minutes. You will be asked to complete the survey only once.

**RISKS:** Some of the questions may make you feel uneasy or uncomfortable. You may also provide sensitive and personal information. You can choose to skip or stop answering any questions that make you uncomfortable. You can also withdraw from participation at any time with no consequences.

**BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits to the research participants. However, findings from this study have the potential to advance knowledge on the relationship between the social worker client relationship and its impact on a youth's decision to participate in the Extended Foster Care program, which has the potential to increase the effectiveness of service delivery as well as outcomes among foster youth.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact Dr. Caroline Lim caroline.lim@csusb.edu or 909-537-5584. You can also contact the California State University, San Bernardino, Institutional Review Board at 909-537-7588.

**RESULTS:** After the completion and publication of the study, results can be found at California State University, San Bernardino, John M. Pfau Library (5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407; 909-537-5090/5091).

### CONFIRMATION STATEMENT

I have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This research project was completed as a collaboration between two partners: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross. The following sections were completed as follows:

1. Data Collection and Data Analysis: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
2. Written Report and Presentation of Findings
  - a. Abstract: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - b. Acknowledgments: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - c. Chapter One. Introduction: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - d. Chapter Two. Literature Review: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - e. Chapter Three. Methods: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - f. Chapter Four. Results: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
  - g. Chapter Five. Discussion: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
3. Supplemental Materials
  - a. IRB Application: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka RossFormatting and Edits: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross
4. Presentation of Findings: Aida Justiz-Skipper and Ericka Ross