AGED OUT YOUTH'S PERCEPTION ON THE NEEDS OF EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

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AGED OUT YOUTH’S PERCEPTION ON THE NEEDS
OF EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

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
Linda Murillo
May 2023
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ABSTRACT

For youth who turn eighteen years of age while they are in the foster care system, turning eighteen can mark the start of a difficult struggle. Foster youth face housing instability, financial insecurity, struggle to obtain a higher education, health insurance insecurity and a higher risk of arrest than youth not in foster care. This research study seeks to assess how effective current policy is at meeting the needs of foster youth aging out of the foster care system and transitioning into young adulthood. At the micro-level this study helps social workers effectively implement transition plans with their clients and at the macro-level this study helps local organizations evaluate how existing policies meet the needs of emancipated foster youth. This study is an exploratory research study with a qualitative study design. The research study was conducted through an interview that was coded for themes and for sub themes.
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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

When most people turn 18 years of age it is a joyous occasion because it marks a person’s official beginning into adulthood. However, for youth who turn eighteen years of age while they are in the foster care system, this milestone can mark the start of a difficult struggle. Generally, eighteen-year-olds continue to rely on their parents for support to meet their basic needs. When youth in the foster care system turn 18, they are emancipated from the foster care system, and the support the system provides to meet their basic needs is terminated. These eighteen-year-olds are immediately pushed into adulthood and often find themselves facing housing instability, financial insecurity, obstacles to obtain a higher education, health care insurance insecurity, and a higher risk of arrest than non-foster youth (Courtney, et. al., 2007).

To help minimize the needs and high risks that emancipated foster youth face, policies were implemented at the macro level. Starting in 1986, the federal government tried to help this population through the creation of the Independent Living Initiative, which gave states funds with which they could prepare foster youth for independent living (Jaudes, 2012). Other policies that have been implemented over the years include the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, the Chaffee Option, and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.
(Jaudes, 2012). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 promoted adoption and permanent homes for foster youth. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 raised the funding given to states to help older youth develop the skills needed for independent living and extended Medicaid coverage to age 20 for foster youth. The Chaffee Option allowed states to use funds to help foster youth with housing and mandated states to offer extended services to foster youth until age 21. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 required states to make sure a transition plan is developed with foster youth at least 90 days before their eighteenth birthday.

Despite the existence of these policies, research shows that there is a gap in services for youth that have been emancipated from the foster care system. For instance, to help youth achieve a postsecondary degree, policies like the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 made foster youth eligible to participate in federal programs such as Upward Bound. These programs allowed former foster youth to file as independents on the FAFSA, and gave them financial assistance until their twenty-first year of age (Okpych, 2012). However, since former foster youth also have to meet their other basic needs, such as housing and employment, they often struggle to finish their degree before turning 21. In other words, emancipated foster youth cannot use the educational assistance provided to them because the age limit is too low. To close this gap in education assistance, researchers like Okpych (2012) proposed raising the age limit for foster youth post-secondary assistance to 25, since research shows that most foster youths complete their postsecondary degree in six years, if at all.

Another gap in services for emancipated foster youth exists in housing.
Foster youth often lack stable living situations and, once they turn 18, they lose the financial, educational, and social support provided to them by the child welfare system (Day et. al., 2017). According to Day et. al. (2017), in California, more than a third of emancipated 19-year-olds experience homelessness and more than 40% couch-surf. In addition, more than 30% of emancipated foster youth report times in which they lived on the streets before turning 26 (Day et. al, 2017). To combat gaps in the system, other researchers have proposed requiring extended foster support. Extended care between the ages of 18 and 19 has positive effects, such as a decline in the risk of arrest after the age of 19 (Courtney, M. E., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to assess how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Although foster care is supposed to be temporary, more than 23,000 foster youth emancipate from the foster care system every year across the nation (Mardueno, 2019). These emancipated youth then are immediately faced with housing, financial, educational, and health care insurance needs that the majority of emancipated youth are not prepared to meet, despite policies that should help them meet these needs (Ahmann, 2017). Foster care agencies need to assess how effective their current policies are to evaluate how their policies are currently affecting this population and how it will affect them in the future. Assessing these policies will also help foster care agencies learn how they can better serve this population. Once foster care
agencies determine why these policies may not be effective at helping foster youth become self-sufficient, changes can be made to improve current and future policies. Foster care agencies will also be able to develop better timelines to more effectively help youth transition out of the system.

The type of design that was used in this research study was a qualitative research design. This overall research method was selected because this study sought to explore what policies can be implemented or adjusted at the micro-level to help meet the needs of emancipated foster youth. Although quantitative study designs are focused on gathering numerical data to generalize it across groups of people, a qualitative study designs was ultimately chosen. Qualitative studies are designed to gather numerical data in order to understand experiences, and the participants of this study will be talking about individual experiences. The data for this study was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. To minimize any biases and misrepresentation of data open ended questions were used for the interview questions.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have the potential to inform social work practice on the micro and macro levels. At the micro-level, results can help foster youth that is close to aging out of the system prepare for young adulthood. According to existing literature, emancipated foster youth typically are not prepared to be self-efficient. However, this study’s findings can help social workers properly prepare youth currently in the foster care system for young adulthood. Results can also help agencies evaluate their current policies to assess how well they are
serving their foster youth overall.

At the macro level, results may help larger organizations evaluate existing policies meant to meet the needs of emancipated foster youth. Organizations, such as county CPS service providers, need to explore how to minimize service gaps and implement policies that better serve their clients. This study will also offer suggestions to researchers about ways to further explore the issue. Gaps in the literature on the needs of emancipated foster youth leave the social workers that serve them without the tools to effectively address these needs.

Research shows that halting services for emancipated foster youth at the age of 18 only puts this population at risk for many socioeconomic issues and other problems related to transitioning to adulthood. These risks include not being able to obtain a higher education, stable housing, and financial security. The policies that exist to help this population still struggle from support gaps and are not as effective as policymakers and social workers intended. Therefore, the aim of this study is to answer the question, how effective are current policies at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood?
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report, 20,445 foster youth, or eight percent of all youth in the foster care system, were emancipated from the foster care system in 2019 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Emancipated foster youth often struggle to meet their basic needs upon exiting the foster care system including securing a stable housing arrangement, receiving social support, obtaining higher education, and accessing health care services. Factors that may prevent emancipated foster youth from meeting their basic needs include engaging in risky behavior, not receiving independent living services, and facing age limits to assistance.

Housing

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21 (henceforth referred to as “The Midwest Study”) (2007), is the largest study to date that examined emancipated foster youth’s transition out of the system. The study found that 44.3% of emancipated foster youth were living on their own by age 21, 7.6% were living with biological parents, and 16.8% were living with other relatives (Courtney et al., 2007). However, the study also found that at least one-third of the sampled emancipated foster youth faced housing instability. Specifically, one-third lived in three or more places during their
transition to adulthood, 20% lived in four or more places, and 17.7% had been consistently homeless since being emancipated (Courtney et al., 2007). The Midwest Study (2007), however, cannot be representative of all emancipated youth in the United States since the sample is geographically limited to the Midwest and does not compare emancipated foster youth to other former welfare-involved youth. Nonetheless, this information is critical in assessing the needs and risks that foster youth face upon being emancipated from the system because it assessed how emancipated youth faired after their abrupt transition into adulthood.

Compared to youth who were investigated by the child welfare system but never removed from their home, emancipated foster youth experienced almost the same rates of homelessness and housing instability (Day et al., 2017). Of the sampled youth, 15.7% of emancipated foster youth and 17.1% of youth never placed out of home experienced homelessness (Day et al., 2017). Approximately 23.7% of emancipated foster youth and 24.4% of youth never placed out of home experienced housing instability (Day et al., 2017). Despite being nationally representative, this study used data collected in the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II, which only sampled former foster youth in contact with child welfare. In addition to this, the study asked the youth to recall experiences across 12 months without prompts to enhance recall, resulting in underestimated true rates of housing instability.

Abrams and Curry (2014) found that during their emancipation process, a high number of emancipated foster youth reconnect with their biological family and even live with them. It is not clear how many foster youth successfully
reconnect with their biological families or how many emancipated foster youth return to live with their biological families nationwide. There is a gap in the literature on why former foster youth go back to living with their biological family, the quality of this living arrangement, how long this living arrangement lasts, why youth stop living with them, and whether their biological families offer more than just housing stability.

Stott (2012) found that emancipated foster youth have a higher chance of participating in illegal behavior such as substance abuse and sexually risky behaviors when they experience placement instability. Placement instability can lead to feelings of disconnection and hopelessness, which research finds lead foster youth to use substances to cope with these feelings (Stott, 2012). Abrupt endings to important relationships and social support, when moved without notice, may undermine the development of social skills needed to befriend others who are not involved in risky behaviors. Consequently, youth in unstable placements may only socialize with other youth involved in risky behavior. Although this study had a small sample size and may therefore not be representative of all foster youth, it offers insights on the importance of stable placements for foster youth. The impact placement changes have on foster youth indicates that foster youth should be included in discussions about possible placement changes.

Social Support

According to Abrams and Curry (2014), social support is the help and protection given to others by professional or informal sources. Abrams and Curry identified four types of social support that a person needs: emotional support,
instrumental support or goods and services, informational support or problem-solving help, and affirmational support. Unlike other studies, their qualitative study found that receiving support from peers reduced emancipated foster youth’s risk of engaging in risky behavior (Abrams & Curry, 2014). Independent living programs were found to pressure emancipated foster youth to not seek support from others and instead be self-reliant to achieve adulthood (Abrams & Curry, 2014). However, this study was not able to explore the extent to which emancipated foster youth use or seek professional support due to most literature on professional supports emancipated foster youth use being heavily focused on independent living services. In other words, if emancipated foster youth use or attempt to use supports other than independent living services, no accurate number of this can be produced since the federal government, or any other study, does not keep a detailed record of this.

Courtney and Katz (2015) found that youth who reported they had received social support and independent living services were less likely to report unmet needs. This indicates that emancipated foster youth who receive social support feel more secure about their ability to transition to adulthood. The study also indicates that emancipated foster youth who receive social support are also in a much better position to obtain the social services they desire, which lowers their reported unmet needs (Courtney & Katz, 2015). However, the data for this study may be unreliable and skewed since it asked the youth to recall and self-report independent living services provided to them by social service agencies. These findings are similar to the findings in the Midwest Study (2007) because even though eligible youth do not always receive the independent living services
and assistance programs offered to them, emancipated foster youth found these services as potentially beneficial to reducing their unmet needs.

**Education**

According to Johnson (2021), former foster care youth face barriers to obtaining a higher education. One barrier is the trauma experienced by foster youth before and during their time in the foster care system. Trauma can lead to developmental problems such as learning disabilities, emotional disorders, and behavioral problems (Johnson, 2021). An example of trauma experienced by foster youth is placement changes since this could lead to ambiguous losses, school changes, and loss of social support. Other barriers include not graduating high school, being expelled from school, being placed in a low-performing school, being placed in special education, and not being able to meet their needs upon being emancipated out of the foster care system. Johnson (2021) warns however that the findings of this study should be used with caution due to the limited amount of methodological detail used. Nonetheless, this article is crucial at drawing attention to the gap in the literature on emancipated foster youths’ experiences in obtaining a post-secondary degree and drawing attention to the limited amount of literature on this topic that uses methodological detail or used a theoretical framework (Johnson, 2021).

Adams and Kang-Yi (2015) go into further detail on behavioral health disorders among emancipated foster youths, how living with these disorders can lead to a negative transition outcome, and create more barriers to being successful in higher education. Among the children sampled for this study, 37.5% suffered from emotional disturbance, 10.7% had an intellectual disability, 9.5%
had a developmental disability, and 4.5% had learning disabilities (Adams & Kang-Yi, 2015). Adams and Kang-Yi found that youth dually enrolled in special education and foster care do poorly in school, have lower grade point averages, change schools more often, earn fewer credits towards graduating, and have lower scores on state tests. Youth who have disabilities and are in foster care also experience more restrictive special education placements. Adams and Kang-Yi found that the majority of emancipated foster youth stop attending behavioral health treatment not too long after being emancipated. This study however is limited because it focused only on child welfare and behavioral health systems and did not include literature from relevant fields such as special education. Nonetheless, this study is important because it analyzed present child welfare policy and practice, examined policy implications in the field of behavioral health, and examined the present gap in healthcare coverage for young adults.

Healthcare

Jones (2019) found that although state health care was provided to emancipated foster youth, it was only until they were 21 years of age; meanwhile, the health care provided to a child through their parent’s insurance was until the age of 26. The study also found that youth who emancipated from the foster care system at 18 years of age instead of staying in extended foster care use mental health services less often (Jones, 2019). The article suggests that many of the problems these youth face after emancipation may be because emancipated foster youth have health care needs that are not covered by insurance. However, this study also indicates that foster youth that utilize extended foster care services for at least one year have fewer alcohol problems, substance abuse
problems, and behavioral health problems. The findings of this study may be limited due to a gap in the literature on the effectiveness of extended foster care services since no study has been conducted to evaluate extended care. Nonetheless, the findings of this study are important because it compares youth who emancipated from the foster care system at 18 years of age to those who choose to utilize extended foster care.

Limitations in Literature

This study sought to build upon the existing literature to explore what policies can be implemented at the micro-level to help emancipated foster youth thrive. At this current moment, the literature has many limitations such as studies having no methodological detail, not using a theoretical framework, using second hand data to generalize personal experiences across former foster youth, being geographically limited, and having small sample sizes. Further research needs to explore how experiences in the foster care system vary from agency to agency, why foster youth decide to live with their biological families upon emancipation and for how long, and a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of available extended foster care services. This study, therefore, aimed to address some of these limitation in the current literature on emancipated foster youth.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Two theories that were used to conceptualize the conceptualization of this study were resiliency theory and the life course perspective. The current literature on emancipated foster youth and their unmet needs is limited in terms
of the amount of literature that includes methodological detail or uses a theoretical framework. Current and past literature has mainly used resilience theory to explain how emancipated foster youth can use resources within and outside of themselves to overcome challenges (Grey & Yates, 2012). This study, however, also used the life course perspective to analyze emancipated foster youths’ lives based on structural, social, and cultural factors.

Resiliency theory is used in the literature to understand how emancipated foster youth recover from challenges despite not having social support and very limited resources once they are emancipated from the system. Resiliency theory offers a way to examine emancipation and emerging adulthood experiences for foster youth and explore ways for social service agencies to intervene, make the transition experience easier, and help meet basic needs more feasible (Greeson, 2013). In other words, resiliency theory examines how emancipation comes at a difficult time in emerging adulthood for foster youth, between 18 and 25 years of age, when they are becoming independent adults. As with previous studies, this study used the resiliency perspective to locate intervention points in which social service agencies can intervene and implement policies at the micro-level during emancipated foster youth’s emerging adulthood to meet basic needs.

The life course perspective was used to analyze emancipated foster youth’s experiences when foster youth are emancipated from the system. Similarly, Wulcyzn (2020) used the life course perspective to analyze how laws passed at a federal level and diverse operating processes at the state level affect foster youth throughout their lifetime. Wulcyzn (2020) found that the timing and
duration of foster care in a child’s life are vital to how a person applies meaning to the experience. In other words, Wulcyzn (2020), used the life course perspective to explain the impact structural, social, and cultural factors have on foster youth before, during, and after their time in the foster care system.

Summary

This study assessed how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. By evaluating how effective current policies are, foster care agencies can better assess how they can more effectively serve their foster youth who are about to age out of the foster care system. This in turn helps social workers better prepare their foster youth to transition from the foster care system to young adulthood and help them become self-efficient. On a macro level, the results of this study can help organizations that serve foster youth examine gaps in existing in policies and laws to help emancipated foster youth meet their needs.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

Introduction

This study assessed how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. This chapter explores how the study was conducted. The sections that are discussed in this chapter are the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this research study was to assess how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Due to the literature being limited to what policies have been passed to make this transitional period easier, and not on how effective these polices actually are, this research study is an exploratory study. A qualitative study design was chosen in order to allow the researcher to analyze the content provided during the study for themes on the former foster youth’s experiences at the time of their emancipation. To explore how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning into adulthood, the data for this study was collected by conducting 30-minute zoom interviews with participants who have recently aged out of the foster care system. The research participants were solicited online through email or...
social media websites. To minimize any biases and misrepresentation of data the researcher solicited participants from different genders, ages, ethnicities, social media groups, and professions.

A methodological strength of this study design is that instead of using secondary data, like other similar studies have done, for this study first-hand accounts were gathered from young adults who have recently aged out of the foster care system. In-depth interviews with emancipated youth provided the opportunity for participants to share experiences and details on the barriers they faced while transitioning out of the system. This study thereby provides insights into limitations of existing policies that hinder these youth from being successful in adulthood.

A limitation of this study design is that the study required participants to recall past experiences. This is a limitation because the participants were not always able to recall what was being asked of them so the research could not guarantee how valid the participants responses were. Another limitation to this study is that it relied on a small cross-section of former emancipated foster youth. Due to the sample size being small the results cannot be generalized to all children aging out of the foster care system. Not only this but the sample size had to opened up to all former foster youth, not just those that were emancipated, in order to find enough participants. Another limitation is that the interview guide questions is not all inclusive of the many policies that can affect a foster youths transition into young adulthood, which again, is why this study cannot be generalized. There may be policies in other geographical areas not listed in the interview guide that greatly affects the youths’ transition from the
system. The results of this study are meant to be used as a guideline for areas that can be improved upon in current foster care policies, locally and federally.

**Sampling**

This study used a non-random, purposive sample of youth aged 18 or older who recently aged out of the foster care system. These youth were participants from a university program that provides comprehensive support to current and former foster youth as they transition into the university through to graduation. Outside of this university program, the researcher sampled former foster youth recruited from social media sites, such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. A total of 11 individuals participated in an interview with the researcher.

**Data Collection and Instruments**

This study used an exploratory and qualitative research design. Qualitative data was collected through recorded 30-minute interviews conducted over zoom between the researcher and the participant in the winter of 2022. Each interview began by discussing confidentiality, informed consent, and how the recording would be used, stored, and later disposed of after data analysis.

During the interview, the researcher gathered demographic information including participants’ age, gender, ethnicity, years in foster care, the area they grew up in, and education level. During the interview, the researcher asked the participants open-ended questions regarding their experiences related to when they aged out of the foster care system and transitioned into young adulthood.
The open-ended questions used for the interviews were created specifically to explore participants’ experiences during their transition out of the foster care system. Since studies on this issue are limited, the questions used in this study were based on those used in the Midwest Study and were focused on current needs of youth aging out of the foster care system. Specifically, questions explored participants’ experiences with housing instability, financial insecurity, access to higher education, health care insurance insecurity, and risks of arrest. To assess the extent to which current policies helped or hindered participants’ struggles with these issues, additional questions were asked around what could have helped them in their transition in these areas.

Reliability and validity of all data collection tools were informed by the literature and further refined by discussions with research supervisor. Threats to validity in this qualitative study include a small sample size because it can lead to sampling bias. In other words members of a population are more likely to be selected to be sampled than others. Another threat to validity in this study is interpretation validity, or the researcher imposing their own meaning to the data that was collected. Threats to reliability in this study include the participants ability to accurately recall the information that was being asked of them.

Procedures

The researcher solicited participants for this research study in a variety of ways. To collect data from students of a specific university program, the researcher sent an email to the supervisor of the program requesting permission to collect data. For confidentiality purposes, the university program will not be
named. The university program required conditional IRB approval to give the researcher an approval letter to collect data. After obtaining approval to conduct the study with participants of the program, the researcher sent a recruitment email to the supervisor of a specific university program and requested the email be forwarded to the students who are currently in the program. The recruitment email asked participants to contact the researcher using the researcher’s email address. The researcher then contacted interested participants via email and set up appointments to conducted zoom interviews. At the beginning of the zoom interviews, the researcher discussed consent, confidentiality, and how the recorded interview was used, stored, and deleted.

In order to solicit more participants, a recruitment email was also sent by the researcher to the director of the School of Social Work of a university. For confidentiality purposes, the university will not be named. The researcher requested it be forwarded to the students who are currently enrolled in the School of Social Work. The recruitment email asked participants to please email the researcher to the email address included on the flyer. To further solicit more participants, the flyer also included a statement encouraging students to also forward the email with the flyer to other former foster care youth they may know.

To solicit participants and collect data outside of the School of Social Work and university program, the researcher used social media. On social media sites, the researcher posted the study’s flyer and asked interested participants to please email the researcher at the email provided on the flyer. Social media sites that were utilized include Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.
Protection of Human Subjects

The interviews will be conducted and recorded by Zoom on the investigators password protected computer, which also requires a 2 step verification process to access. Zoom recordings and transcripts will also be downloaded and stored on a google drive with a California State University San Bernardino email on the investigators password protected computer. The downloaded Zoom interviews and transcripts will contain no identifying information and will instead contain assigned numbers (1-15) in order to separate the participants' interviews. A year after the study is completed, all Zoom recordings and transcripts will be destroyed from the investigators computer.

Although minimal, a potential short-term risk is that the questions being asked in the interview may trigger past trauma from the participant's experience in the foster care system. In order to minimize this risk even further, participants will be informed at the start of the interview that they can choose to not answer a question if the question causes them any discomfort and that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time. There are no longer term risks for participants. Should participants need counseling services, several referral resources were added to the consent form.

In order to prevent the participants from possibly becoming infected with covid-19, the interviews will be done virtually and all communication will be done via email.
Data Analysis

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed using a transcription feature on Zoom. The transcripts will be corrected for any inaccuracies. The transcripts will be coded by the co-primary investigator in order to discuss the interpretation of themes with the primary investigator. The themes will be organized by the co-primary investigator based on the positive experiences and negative experiences the participants experienced when transitioning from the foster care system, or depending on the question, what path the participants took. This way of using thematic analysis was decided after consulting with a representative from the social work research department. Once data is coded, the information will be inputted in SPSS in order to generate graphs and percentages.

Summary

This study sought to assess how effective current policies are at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. This exploratory study sought to fill in gaps in the existing literature on barriers youth face when transitioning out of the system. This study used a non-random, purposive sample of youth aged 18 and older who recently aged out of the foster care system. Qualitative data was collected using a recorded zoom meeting between the researcher and the participant.
CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Introduction

For the purpose of this research study, data was collected by interviewing former foster youth over the age of 18 over Zoom. The research investigator elicited participants by sharing the research flier on social media websites Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. The research investigator also recruited participants by having the School of Social Work Director and university program share the research study flier via email. Those who received the flier were also asked to share the study with others that may be eligible, which led to more participants. During the interview the participants were asked 10 demographic questions to further identify when the participant was part of the foster care system, in what county, and how that may have affected their transition into young adulthood. Participants were then subsequently asked 14 questions on the participants' personal experience transitioning out of the foster care system and their first year following their exit from the foster care system.

Analyses

The following tables show a breakdown of the participants' demographics based on the answers they gave. Table one shows that out of the 11 participants that took part in the study, the participants were between the ages of 21-48. The second table shows that the majority of those that participated in the study were female. Table three shows that the majority of those that participated in the study identified as
hispanic/latino. The fourth table shows that all 11 participants had completed a high school diploma or equivalent. Table five shows that the majority of the participants were currently employed full time. The sixth table shows that 4 of the participants are married, 4 are single, and 2 are divorced. Table seven shows that the majority of the participants spent a majority of their time growing up in foster care in Los Angeles county. The eighth table shows that the years each participant spent in the foster care system ranges from 0-18 years. Table nine shows that the majority of the participants exited the foster care system between 2000-2005. The tenth table shows that the majority of of the participants exited foster care at the age of 18.

For questions 11-24 of the interview questions, the participants responses were analyzed for their content and emerging themes. Responses were categorized into positive or negative experiences reported by the participants or, depending on the question, what paths the participants took in their personal experiences. The quotes that were included below were taken from the participants responses to the interview questions.

Table 1. Current Age

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<thead>
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<td>41 or more</td>
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Figure 1. Current Age

![Bar chart showing frequency of current age categories: 18-24, 25-30, 31-35, 36-40, and 41 or more.](chart.png)
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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**Figure 2. Gender**

Gender

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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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### Table 3. Ethnicity

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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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### Figure 3. Ethnicity

![Bar chart showing frequency of different ethnicities]
Table 4. Highest Degree Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
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<td>Master's Degree</td>
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Figure 4. Highest Degree Completed

![Highest Degree Completed Chart](chart.png)
### Table 5. Current Employment Status

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<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Part-time (&lt;40 hours a week)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Full-time (&gt;40 a week)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

### Figure 5. Current Employment Status

- **Current Employment Status**
  - **Unemployed**
  - **Part-time (<40 hours a week)**
  - **Full-time (>40 a week)**
Table 6. Marital Status

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Single (Never Married)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Divorced</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>90.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Missing     | Not Applicable         | 1         | 9.1     |               |                    |
| Total       |                        | 11        | 100.0   |               |                    |

Figure 6. Marital Status
Table 7. What County Did You Grow Up In?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
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<td>Riverside</td>
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<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>

Figure 7. What County Did You Grow Up In?
Table 8. Years in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Foster Care</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>4-6</td>
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<td>7-9</td>
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<td>10-13</td>
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<td>9.1</td>
<td>81.8</td>
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<td>14-18</td>
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</table>

Figure 8. Years in Foster Care

![Years in Foster Care](image_url)
Table 9. What Year Did You Exit Foster Care?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
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<td>2000-2005</td>
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<td>2006-2010</td>
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<td>2011-2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-Present</td>
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</table>

Figure 9. What Year Did You Exit Foster Care?
This study seeks to answer how effective are current policies at helping emancipated foster youth meet their needs when transitioning from foster care to adulthood. In order to answer this question an exploratory and qualitative research study design was used to explore how policies at the time the participants were in the foster care system affected their transition into young adulthood. Participants were asked questions on their personal experience transitioning out of the foster care system and their first year following their exit from the system. Due to the variation in responses provided for questions 11-24 of the interview questions, the participants...
responses were analyzed and categorized for their content and emerging themes. More specifically responses were categorized into whether participants reported a positive or negative experience or, depending on the question, what paths the participants took. The quotes included below were taken from the participants responses to the interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I don’t know what the life skills assessment is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I don’t recall having a life skills assessment. I did take independent living classes but I don’t recall a life skills assessment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Well from my own personal experiences it’s kinda more like something to do, kind of like a check list, but it doesn’t really have any like real significance or weight to it when I was doing them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “It's been a long time, but I do remember it didn't seem very accurate. It didn't seem like it covered everything or applied everything. And then I know we had classes, so they would give us them, the assessments before and after. [...] I just feel like it didn't ask the right questions and address (the right topics). Really the things we were going through.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 12: How did you find out about Independent Living or Transitional Living programs?

Personal Communication, Participant 1, November 2022

- “As far as independent living or transitional programs at the time I did not hear about it.”

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “From my social worker.”

Personal Communication, Participant 3, November 2022

- “I didn’t. I was never notified about them. Well I guess I found out about it when I was completing my master’s degree work as an adult”

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

- “I found out that information through the Foster Care Agency that I was in a group home with and went through a transitional housing program at the age of 17. They offered those classes in a program like that.”
Table 13. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 13: Please describe your experience participating in an Independent Living or a Transitional Living program.

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

• “I participated in probably 6 to 8 different classes my senior year I believe and it was you know, it was interesting but probably the only topic that I feel like actually helped was one about balancing a check book. So I did go and I appreciated it as a foster youth. You know I appreciated that they were preparing us but it was also kind of, you know, it felt short. Like it, there were so many details to living on your own that it didn’t really cover [...] unless there are like actual hands on transitional help into you know, getting an apartment and getting a job, I feel like the classes are not that helpful.

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

• “I think at the time I was going through it I wasn’t taking it seriously, and was going through the motions for the sake of the rewards that they were giving at the time for attending those classes, and I just kind of went through it. But as an adult looking back, I definitely learned how to do things through that program that would help me later in life that I kind of took for granted at the time.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

• “With the transitional housing program I think that it was a great opportunity but I felt like there was a lack of…just like in a traditional home setting you would have that family orientation that would kind of keep you on the straight and narrow in terms of avoiding the bad, the bad things out in the world, you know?”
Table 14. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 14: Please tell me about your experience in developing an Independent Living Plan for yourself.

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “That I did with my social worker from the time I was about 16 years old and basically it’s like what are your goals and it’s not so much…it wasn’t like college. Like where are you gonna go when you age out? Do you have any family? List any family you think you know. It was basically preparing me for when I was 18, and then like military was heavily pushed to. Like have you thought about joining the service? What are your grades right now? Are you gonna graduate on time?”

Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022

- “So that was pretty helpful. It kind of gave me something tangible to hold myself accountable for my own transition plan. So if something went wrong I didn’t have anybody else to blame it was just on me.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

- “I think my mindset was really just focused on making sure I could survive, you know? Like I really had to take a step back and weigh out, whether going to school full time would support me rather than finding a job that could support me and so it kind of more pushed me in the direction of the workforce.”
Table 15. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 15: In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan helped you transition into young adulthood?

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “I felt that it was a rude awakening. That if I didn’t start planning my life like when I turned 18 I was gonna have nothing. Kind of like a scared straight program. I don’t think so much it prepared me for adulthood or independent living, it just had me pick one thing and had me just try to stick with it.”

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

- “I don’t feel that it actually helped me. [...] I feel like everyone was just starting to look at these issues. I mean I’ll say that the one way, that I probably saved some money because we talked. Because we were discussing the reality of expenses. [...] it helped me to really reflect on that I was going to be responsible for all of these expenses. [...] Just writing a plan on paper and not having additional supports I don’t feel would have been that helpful.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

- “I would say it provided a visual of steps. A visual and a list of steps that I needed to do just to be prepared along with the, I guess, the ability to apply the different skills in real life.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

- “I think it really just helped with money management and being realistic with what I could afford and how to go about saving. [...] being realistic about that what I could forward, what it was going to take to actually maintain it, which I mean at that time that those are very important things going into adulthood.”
In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan could have been more helpful?

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

• “It could have been helpful if it was focused more on like maybe what I wanted to do in life. Like my personal goals and since it was started two years prior, like how am I gonna reach that.”

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

• “I feel that actively connecting youth to resources like low income housing and I think these are things that are happening more now [...] You know, stipend for foster youth to have help with the transition. That is a rough transition so there needs to be like actual financial support and transitional resources, like housing or job assistance and counseling [...] a regular meeting with someone that is helping you to meet the goals on your independent living plan. A follow up.”

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

• “So in that sense, it would have been helpful, probably, if I had gone through an independent living program or independent living plan with a social worker or staff from the foster family agency but I don't feel like that was really done at that time.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

• “I would say, probably just more financial support because at the time we didn't have extended foster care or anything like that. When you're done with foster care at 18 you were just done, so if you didn't have natural supports or other people that, you know, were willing to help you, you're kind of just on your own.”
Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

• “I think it would have been helpful if it started earlier. I think it’s important. I think I would have liked it more, at like either beginning of high school. But then those 4 years kind of slowly prepping us to know what it’s going to be like. I think it would have been helpful if they actually talked with us and not just our placement, or our parents, because there’s always a chance that that fails, or there’s no consistency with that.”
Table 17. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 17: Please tell me about your experience developing a transition plan for your exit from foster care.

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

• “[…] they said ‘okay she’s gonna age out, we really don’t have anywhere for her to go, we don’t really have a plan.’ This all happened like really fast, […] it was really rushed before my 18th birthday.”

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

• “It was like this is what’s happening. It was like your’e reuniting with mom. This is where you’re going. This is the home you’re going to. This is your court day. Oh here you go. There was no, yeah there was no planning.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

• “I don't think I really had a transition plan. I just after I graduated, it was basically like I had to leave the foster home, and then I already knew what I was doing. So I mean I had support, but at that time I just didn't have the support of, like my foster parents. So that was a little difficult so I don't think there was really any specific plan.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

• “I think the only plan we had at the time was just small. Like I remember a social worker coming in and having a paper and it was like basic goals. Whether or not we wanted to have our driver's license. Whether we wanted to go to college. Where we would stay when we'd go to college.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

• “I feel like the plan I made was just to figure out what worked and run with it, and just keep working. That's I feel like all I've been doing is working my whole life.”
Table 18. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 18: Please tell me about your first year out of foster care.

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

• “I did move away for a little while and I came back and just started working to take care of my upcoming impending child and yeah, been working ever since.”

Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022

• “Oh, that was a struggle. They did set me up with three months worth of rent, so they paid it directly to my landlord at the time, so that was a lot of help. I feel like they actually had me set up. My social worker back then did connect me to food stamps, so I was able to get food stamps.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

• “It was real rough. I was going to school out of state, and I was living on campus. So when it came to like breaks, or, you know, needing school supplies, or even clothes, or personal hygiene items. It was just rough, because I was working as like a student helper, but I mean I wasn't making a lot of money and a lot of the school money went to maintaining, you know, housing and books and all that.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

• “It didn't seem like any difference other than the fact that I didn't have family to lean on, so it just it felt very isolated.”
Table 19. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 19: How did you find housing during your first year out of the foster care system?

**Personal Communication, Participant 1, November 2022**
- “Got returned to the custody of my mother.”

**Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022**
- “It was just you know living on campus in a dorm.”

**Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023**
- “I kind of just couch surfed and, while I was pregnant, and then I ended up reunifying with my mom.”

**Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023**
- “I used Facebook marketplace for rental places. I used Zillow just stuff like that.”
Table 20. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 20: How did you find social support during your first year out of the foster care system?

Personal Communication, Participant 1, November 2022

- “Social support was pretty much non-existent, you know? I was returning back to the custody of my mother, obviously I was enrolled into a different school and everything was new for like the fifth time so it was really hard to make friends.”

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “That I didn’t have and that’s why I think it was a very dark time.”

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

- “On my own. Just through my own social group of a couple of friends.”

Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022

- “The program on campus that really helped me, they really became like my second family.”

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

- “The church. It definitely came from people who are willing to invest their time into me and help me figure out what I needed to do with myself and friends that I had at the time, their families even. Yeah, I think that’s that’s probably about it.”
Table 21. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 21: Please tell me about your experience paying for college.

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “So back, this was the old days, this was the early 2000s, there was a financial aid office where you would go and fill out the FAFSA by hand so there was somebody there that was experienced with foster kids and so they would help, they helped me with that.”

Personal Communication, Participant 3, November 2022

- “I maxed out all of my student loans. I had no idea that I qualified for certain scholarships or grants or that I should be checking in on my FAFSA every year but I was at one time part of the foster care system.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

- “Most of my fees I got student loans. I mean I did like grants or scholarships like here and there, but majority of them were student loans.”

Personal Communication, Participant 10, February 2023

- “I didn't pay for college (paid with grants offered to former foster youth).”
Table 22. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 22: How did you obtain healthcare during your first year out of the foster care system?

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

• “I didn’t, I didn’t have health care. When I was sick I didn’t go to the doctor, I didn’t have dental, I didn't have anything for many years.”

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

• “On my own.”

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

• “It was part of the school, I had it through the school.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

• “Medical quickly picked me up because I was pregnant.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

• “Luckily you get health care to the age of 26, I believe with medical. So that kind of rolled over.”
Table 23. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 23: Please tell me about how the foster care system treated you?

Personal Communication, Participant 1, November 2022

• “As far as treated goes I feel like I was put in a few incompatible households.”

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

• “[…] the social worker switched so often like you usually get a letter that said ‘oh your’e social worker is switching’ or they would say that they would come and visit and do check ins and they wouldn’t. I had probably 2 good social workers like the whole time, yeah, it was a mess.”

Personal Communication, Participant 3, November 2022

• “I didn’t even know who my caseworker was. I had an initial interview in the office with the person that was going to be my caretaker and the social worker and then I had no further contact with them or follow up for the next year, year and a half. So I have no idea what was said, what the case status was, nothing.”

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

• “I guess I would say fair. It’s kind of hard to like judge it all in one. When I think about like foster care then I think about the homes I was in. […] I mean there’s no place like being at home even though you don’t realize that you got removed for a reason when your’e that age, but yeah, fair.”

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

• “Oh I was very much like someone who fell through the cracks of the foster care system. […] I’m grateful for foster care. I’m grateful somebody was ensuring I had a place to be but the experience of being passed around like that was very damaging to my sense of self.”
Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022

- “I think they did their best. Obviously I was in retrospect now I can see that you know it was vital to my safety and my siblings safety to be removed.”

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

- “I would say they treated me like something that they were responsible for to keep alive, but not really provide a loving home to. I moved around quite a bit when I first went into Foster care system.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

- “Overall I would say fairly. I mean I don't really know. I don't think it was the worst, but it definitely wasn't you know, supportive, nurturing. Kinda prepare me for what was to come kind of situation…definitely things could have been better.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

- “I just think we were passed through. I don't think we were ever really, our concerns were never really met, and they just, you know, I just always felt like we were just paperwork to be done and then a check-in to be made.”

Personal Communication, Participant 10, February 2023

- “From what I can remember really well. but I think that's contributed to the interaction I had with my foster mother. She was very close with me.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

- “[…] it was very difficult in the foster care system, just because finding placement for me first of all was very difficult because of the laws. During that time I couldn’t be placed in a girl's home because of my gender […]”
Table 24. Research Category: Interview Guide, Question 24: In what ways did you feel they could have treated you better?

Personal Communication, Participant 1, November 2022

- “[…] I think as far as parent’s trying to get custody back of their kids you know because of like drug use or neglect, etc, I think they have to do drug testing and you know report for things like that […] But that’s about it.”

Personal Communication, Participant 2, November 2022

- “They could have been more consistent. I think if they, I don’t know how it is now, but back then therapy wasn’t a thing so if they probably implemented something like that so the child knows how to like express their emotions, how to or maybe like a support group.”

Personal Communication, Participant 3, November 2022

- “Contact would have been nice. I think there should have been regular contact between the case worker and the child, myself at the time.”

Personal Communication, Participant 4, November 2022

- “But maybe, definitely then listen to what I have to say and my opinion of things; and treated us as equals, I say us because I have siblings, we were sometimes in the same house and we weren’t necessarily treated equal like as their own children […] being included in what we wanted for our lives and the plan […]”

Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

- “I’m just saying like these are almost like pipe dreams because I know how the system is and this almost feels like its almost impossible you know but I feel like so much would be better for a foster youth especially when going through such fragmenting experience if they had like a consistent social worker.”
Table 24. Continued

Personal Communication, Participant 6, November 2022

• “For sure the trauma informed care from my caregivers.”

Personal Communication, Participant 7, February 2023

• “I think the foster care system could use a different mindset in the sense of love.”

Personal Communication, Participant 8, February 2023

• “I would say probably more checkups in person.”

Personal Communication, Participant 9, February 2023

• “I think if they were able to personalize our visits, if they were able to actually build that rapport. I know that's difficult, but to make it seem like they’re actually, you know, they're for us. And this is, you know, the best intention rather than a placement and a check-in and a ‘okay let me get this kid off of my caseload.’”

Personal Communication, Participant 10, February 2023

• “I think providing more resources or just information about what services are available. What what kind of like, if there's any, community connections, or if there's anything that you know that that can be provided to even kids that get adopted who were in the foster system […]”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

• “I feel like there should have been more, a more, a broader population for the LGBT community that are in foster care […]”
Personal Communication, Participant 5, November 2022

• “Oh the other thing I want to say about foster youth, you know I had a big protective factor which is that I could do well academically. It helped me because even though I moved schools so many times and I changed schools so many times, I could always go and do well in that environment […] I would wish that every foster youth could have like a casa mentor. You know a solid relationship with someone? Someone that helps to cultivate their gifts and talents and helps them find places to feel good about themselves.”

Personal Communication, Participant 11, February 2023

• “I just feel like I know slowly, things are starting to get better in foster care system. […] it sucks that there are kids who have to fall through the cracks while that happens, while that slowly progresses. So I just wish it was more on a forefront that these are just like the other kids. They are the future of America, and they should be treated as such.”
CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the content presented in the tables in chapter four and the implications it has on how effective current policies are at helping foster youth successfully transition from the foster care system into young adulthood. The following discussion will be done by first introducing part of the content of each table in this chapter, then exploring the themes that emerged, and then discussing the content’s significance. The contents from each table are on the following interview guide questions: experience completing a Life Skills Assessment, found out about Independent Living or Transitional Living programs, experience participating in an Independent Living or a Transitional Living program, experience in developing an Independent Living Plan for yourself, how the Independent Living Plan helped transition into young adulthood, how the Independent Living Plan could have been more helpful, experience developing a transition plan for your exit, first year out of foster care, found housing during their first year out, found social support during their first year out, experience paying for college, obtained healthcare during their first year out, how the foster care system treated the youth, and how the youth felt they could have been treated better. The last part of this chapter will include recommendations on how the findings of this research study could be applied to current social work policy in order to make the transition from the foster care system into young adulthood more successful.
Discussion

Demographic Questions

The first ten tables included in chapter four were tables for the demographic questions of the interview guide. The demographic questions were included to gather more information of what outside factors may have affected the client’s successful transition from the foster care system into young adulthood. Table one shows that the participants were between the ages of 21-48. The second table shows that the majority of the participants were female. Table three shows that the majority of the participants identified as hispanic/latino. The fourth table shows that all 11 participants had completed a high school diploma or equivalent. Table five shows that the majority of the participants were currently employed full time. The sixth table shows that 4 of the participants are married, 4 are single, and 2 are divorced. Table seven shows that the majority of the participants spent a majority of their childhood in foster care in Los Angeles county. The eighth table shows that the years each participant spent in the foster care system ranges from 0-18 years. Table nine shows that the majority of the participants exited the foster care system between 2000-2005. The tenth table shows that the majority of the participants exited foster care at the age of 18.

When asked the demographic question, “What county did you grow up in,” it emerged that some participants had grown up in multiple counties because they moved around a lot due to the foster care system. The responses reflect what county the participants felt they had spent the most time growing up in during their childhood. The content in table nine reflects the responses the the question, “What year did you exit foster care?” During this questions it began to emerge that some participants aged out of the foster care system before the current policies to help foster youth transition out of
the system successfully was put in place in 2008. Although the majority of participants were in foster care after 1986, or after the federal government tried to help this population through the creation of the Independent Living Initiative, most aged out before the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Jaudes, 2012). Ultimately the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 is the law that required states to make sure a transition plan is developed with foster youth at least 90 days before their eighteenth birthday. The year the participants exited foster care is important because it affects the experiences participants had while transitioning out of the foster and their first year out of the system. It also sheds light on how the continued implementations of these laws has helped change this transition over the years.

When asked the demographic question, “How old were you when you exited foster care (in years)” it emerged that not all participants exited the foster care system at the age of 18 or extended foster care at the age of 21. Some of the participants were reunified with their families or adopted and therefore were not adult enough to be offered the opportunity to participate in independent living programs or transitional living programs. This content is reflected in table ten.

**Experience Completing a Life Skills Assessment**

The content for table eleven emerges from the question “Please describe your experience completing a Life Skills Assessment.” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 3 did not recall doing one, 5 said they did not do one, and 3 did one. The participants that completed a life skills assessment reported “it’s kinda more like something to do, kind of like a check list, but it doesn’t really have any like real significance,” and “it didn't ask the right questions and address. Really
things we were going through." This suggests that of the life skills assessment does not help prepare foster youth to transition out of the foster care system, the way it is designed to do. As one of the participants noted it “addressed a lot of things that I think were typical for especially teenagers,” but not what the foster youths themselves were actually experiencing, meaning the extent to which it can help prepare the youth may be limited.

**Found Out About Independent Living or Transitional Living Programs**

The content for table twelve emerges from the question, “How did you find out about Independent Living or Transitional Living programs?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 4 reported learning after exiting foster care, 1 reported their social worker informed them, 2 their placement informed them, 1 reported their Independent Living Program coordinator, 1 adopted parents, and 2 stated this question did not apply to them because they have never heard about these programs. In other words, the majority of participants were not informed of these programs before exiting foster care. As stated in the demographic questions, this can be due to a number of outside factors such as exiting foster care before the age of 18 or exiting before these programs were implemented. However, the low number of participants that knew about these programs suggests that participation in these programs is something that is not being actively discussed with foster youth. More participation in these programs can lead to a more successful transition into young adulthood, as participation in theses programs is designed to do.

**Experience Participating in an Independent Living or a Transitional Living Program**

The content for table thirteen emerges from the question, “Please describe your experience participating in an Independent Living or a Transitional Living program.”
Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 5 reported not participating in either program, 5 participated in the independent living program, and 1 participated in the transitional living program. The participants that participated in the independent living program reported that “unless there are like actual hands on transitional help into you know, getting an apartment and getting a job, I feel like the classes are not that helpful,” and “I wasn’t taking it seriously, and was going through the motions.” This suggests that the life skill classes that were offered as part of the independent living program were not found to be helpful. The contents in table thirteen suggests further that this was in part due to the topics chose, since it was not relevant to what foster youth was struggling with and how hands off the classes are. The participant that participated in the transitional living program reported that “it was a great opportunity but I felt like there was a lack of, just like in a traditional home setting you would have that family orientation that would keep you on the straight and narrow.” This highlights that in order for the transitional living program to be more successful it may need more elements of a traditional family setting.

**Experience in Developing an Independent Living Plan for Yourself**

The content for table fourteen emerges from the question, “Please tell me about your experience in developing an Independent Living Plan for yourself.” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 7 reported they did not develop an independent living plan, 1 reported collaborating with their social worker to develop it, and 3 reported developing it. The participants that did not develop an independent living plan reported that “I think we wrote some things out but because I was going to college,” and “that was pretty helpful it kind of gave me something tangible to hold myself accountable for my own transition plan.” The participants that did develop
an independent living implied having a positive experience developing one. The participant that collaborated with their social worker reported “it was very stressful because I was trying to name relatives only like oh I know their first name, I don’t know their last name.” This suggests that the participant had a negative experience developing an independent living plan due to not knowing enough information to complete it. This content implicates that the majority of the participants did not develop an independent living plan and instead had to figure things out on their own once they left the foster care system. This connection may imply that social workers need to make time with their clients to help them develop their independent living plans so that their transition out of the system can be premeditated and more successful.

How the Independent Living Plan Helped Transition into Young Adulthood

The content for table fifteen emerges from the question, “In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan helped you transition into young adulthood?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 5 reported not doing an independent living plan, 2 reported it not preparing them for young adulthood, and 4 reported it was helpful. The participants that did not find the independent living plan helped with their transition into young adulthood reported “I don’t think so much it prepared me for adulthood or independent living, it just had me pick one thing and had me just try to stick with it,” and “I don’t feel that it actually helped me.” This suggests that the participants that had a negative experience with the independent living plan did so due to being a rude awakening into young adulthood. It is also implied that the experience my have been more positive had it prepared the youth better and included more information and hands on support. The participants that did find the independent living plan helped with their transition into young adulthood reported “the life skills that I
gained, the connections,” “I would say it provided a visual of steps, a visual, and a list of steps that I needed to do,” “it definitely helped me manage my money and get where I needed to be financially,” and “It taught me that I need to be self-sufficient.” This suggests that the participants had a positive experience with the independent living plan due to the information and life skills obtained. This reinforces the implication that the independent living plan may be more effective if it provides more information, more applicable life skills, and hands on support.

How the Independent Living Plan Could Have Been More Helpful

The content for table sixteen emerges from the question, “In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan could have been more helpful?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 4 did not share how independent living plan could have been more helpful and 7 reported how it could have been more helpful. It was reported that it could have been more helpful “if it was focused more on like maybe what I wanted to do in life,” “wraparound services,” “a little bit more hands on,” “gone through an independent living program or independent living plan with a social worker or staff,” “more financial support,” “if it started earlier,” and “past 21 getting support.” This suggests that the independent living plan itself is limited in the extent of how it can actually help foster youth make this transition. Although some of the issues may have been corrected due to the participants exiting foster care during different years, the majority of participants listed a different way the independent living plan could be better. The majority of the suggestions seem to imply that more support is desired whether that is in the shape of collaboration from the social worker, finances, resources, or more time to develop the plan and make it personal.
Experience Developing a Transition Plan For Your Exit

The content for table seventeen emerges from the question, “Please tell me about your experience developing a transition plan for your exit from foster care.” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 6 reported not developing a transition plan for their exit, 4 reported it was a negative experience, 1 reported they developed it without the foster care agency. Participants that had a negative experience reported “it was really rushed before my 18th birthday,” “I feel like it was just a piece of paper,” “I felt like it if I didn’t really have time in making like a stable plan,” and “I remember a social worker coming in and having a paper and it was like basic goals.” This suggests that participants may have had a more positive experience had they had more time to develop their transition plan and if they were given the opportunity to develop a more comprehensive transition plan for themselves.

Participants that did not develop a transition plan reported “I don’t think I really had a transition plan. I just after I graduated, it was basically like I had to leave the Foster home,” and “I don’t recall like any independent living or transition planning. It was like this is what’s happening.” The content implies that an exit out of foster care in which a transition plan has not been developed can be jarring. Transition plans can help connect foster youth to outside resources in which they can get their needs met so that the transition is not so jarring, especially in case were transition plans were never created.

First Year Out of Foster Care

The content for table eighteen emerges from the question, “Please tell me about your first year out of foster care.” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 7 reported a negative experience, 2 reported a neutral experience, 1 reported a positive experience, and 1 could not recall. Participants that
had a negative experience reported that “the county kind of dropped the ball on that because I was placed in a really unsafe environment,” “I didn't know what to do and I felt very helpless,” “I would say I had a lot of mental health challenges,” “it was real rough,” “I didn't have family to lean on so it just it felt very isolated,” and “the first year was a really intense check into reality that I was on my own.” The content implies that most participants had a negative experience during their first year out of the foster care system. The content suggests this is due to the sudden challenges of providing for themselves with limited social support, and struggling with mental health issues.

Participants that had a neutral experience reported “I got pregnant right away,” and the transition being a struggle despite being connected to resources. Participants that reported a positive experience reported “I was meeting regularly with a couple of guys that mentored me during that time.” This suggests that being connected to mentors made the difference between a negative and positive experience for this participants.

The content implicates that the first year may be a negative experience for a variety of factors, but the underlying reason is struggling to suddenly provide entirely for oneself.

**Found Housing During Their First Year Out**

The content for table nineteen emerges from the question, “How did you find housing during your first year out of the foster care system?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 3 lived with family, 3 lived on their own, 3 lived in the dorms, 1 couch surfed, and 1 participant was adopted. The content of this table implies that most participants do not return to live with their biological families upon exiting the foster care system. This highlights the need to educate the foster youth how to find and afford housing upon exiting the foster care system because they will soon be
providing for themselves without any assistance. This would be an excellent life skills that would be better taught through a hands on experience.

**Found Social Support During Their First Year Out**

The content for table twenty emerges from the question, “How did you find social support during your first year out of the foster care system?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 4 reported not having social support and 7 reported having social support. Participants that reported having no social support reported “social support was pretty much non-existent you know,” and “that I didn’t have, and that’s why I think it was a very dark time.” The implication of this content suggests that social support can make the transition from foster care to young adulthood much easier or harder. Participants that did report having social support reported receiving support “through my own social group of a couple of friends. Nobody reached out to me after being discharged,” “the university counseling center and I also saw a mentor,” “The program on campus,” “the church.” “I had foster siblings, I had the opportunity to connect with my biological family,” and “school.” The content provided in response to this question highlights how social support can come in a variety of forms but that ultimately social support is needed during this transition period.

**Experience Paying for College**

The content for table twenty-one emerges from the question, “Please tell me about your experience paying for college.” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 8 reported receiving grants for former foster youth, 1 reported not knowing they qualified for certain grants, 1 reported paying everything on their own, and 1 reported using both grants and loans. The content of this table suggests that the majority of the participants were aware that they were eligible for
grants offered only to former foster youth. Although not all participants completed college, most reported paying for college as a positive experience. The implication is that financial support and knowledge made the transition to college easier for the former foster youth.

**Obtained Healthcare During Their First Year Out**

The content for table twenty-two emerges from the question, “How did you obtain healthcare during your first year out of the foster care system?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 5 reported having healthcare through medical, 3 reported not having healthcare, 1 reported having healthcare through marriage, 1 reported having healthcare on their own, and 1 reported having healthcare through the school. The content suggests that the majority of participants had healthcare their first year after exiting foster care, mainly through medical. It is also implied through the content of this table that those that did not have medical and needed it, sought other means to obtain it, such as getting married. However, as one participated noted, the age until when a person has medical has changed; “luckily you get health care to the age of 26, I believe with medical, so that kind of rolled over.” Having not to worry about health care for that long turned this into a positive experience for this participant, something that can be changed to current policy more effective during this transition period.

**How the Foster Care System Treated the Youth**

The content for table twenty-three emerges from the question, “Please tell me about how the foster care system treated you?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 7 reported a negative experience, 3 reported a fair experience, and 1 reported a positive experience. The participant that reported a
positive experience stated “from what I remembered, I always had a positive outlook on the Foster care system, as far as what I experienced.” It is important to note that this participant was adopted out of the system. The participants that reported a fair experience stated “overall I would say fairly, I mean I don't really know, I don't think it was the worst, but it definitely wasn’t, you know, supportive,” “I think they were pretty fair to me,” and “I guess I would say fair. It's kind of hard to like judge it all in one.” The implication with the participants that reported a fair experience is that some of their needs were still met while they were in the system. One participant reported some of the families they were placed with being good, another participant reported the system facilitating visits with their siblings, and another reflected on the system not being the worst. The participants that had negative experiences reported more negatives than positives in their overall experience such as being moved around a lot and not having consistent visits with their social worker. Had the overall negative experience been minimized, the participants overall experience during this transition period may not have been overall negative. This is important because by making small changes over time to overall improve the transition period experience, less foster youth should have an overall negative experience aging out of the system.

How the Youth Felt They Could Have Been Treated Better

The content for table twenty-four emerges from the question, “In what ways did you feel they could have treated you better?” Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants all 11 participants provided suggestions on how they could have been treated better. Some of the suggestions provided included using “drug testing,” “if they probably implemented something so the child knows how to like express their emotions,” “regular contact between the case worker and the child,” “listen
to what I have to say and my opinion of things; and treated us as equals,” “a consistent social worker,” “the trauma informed care from my caregivers,” “a different mindset in the sense of love,” “more checkups in person,” “I think if they were able to personalize our visits, if they were able to actually build that rapport,” “I think providing more resources,” and “a broader population for the LGBT community that are in foster care.” The content reflects what all eleven participants suggested and the most stated suggested is regular visits with their social worker. It highlights how that one change may have changed the participants overall experience in the foster care system. However, as one participant stated, due to the social worker’s caseloads that is not an easy change to make.

Additional Thoughts

The content for table twenty-five emerges from any additional thoughts the participants had after answering all the interview guide questions. Participants responded with variable responses but of the 11 participants 2 provided additional thoughts. The two participants suggested other ways in which the believe the foster care system’s current policies could be improved to provided a more positive experience while in the system and during the transition from foster care into young adulthood.

One participant suggested “I would wish that every foster youth could have like a casa mentor. You know a solid relationship with someone? Someone that helps to cultivate their gifts and talents and helps them find places to feel good about themselves.” The participant wanted to highlight how protective factor, like being good at something, helps the foster youth feel good about themselves despite how damaging being in the foster care system can be. The participant suggested that having someone
in the youth’s life help the youth develop this area they are good at, will also help increase their protective factor.

Another participant reported “I just feel like I know slowly, things are starting to get better in foster care system. [...] it sucks that there are kids who have to fall through the cracks while that happens, while that slowly progresses. So I just wish it was more on a forefront that these are just like the other kids. They are the future of America, and they should be treated as such.” The participant wanted to highlight that the foster care system and its policies are changing for the better but that this change is slow to happen. The foster care system from 10 years ago is not the same foster care system of today due to the progress that has been made.

Recommendations for Social Work Research, Policy, and Practice

The information that was gathered through this research study reflects a deeper understanding of how effective policies to help foster youth transition out of the foster care system and into young adulthood are at the present moment. The information provided by this research study can be used to guide research into policies used during this transition period, guide the reforming of social work policy on transitioning out of the foster care system, and inform social work practice on how these policies have affected the transition of former youth over the past couple decades. The following are the researcher’s recommendations for social work research, policy, and practice.

Research

The most recent policy, The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, required states to make sure a transition plan is developed with foster youth at least 90 days before their eighteenth birthday. Despite this law being
passed former foster youth are still reporting that their transition plans are not being done or they are being rushed. This transition plan is suppose to help guide the youth with their decisions and planning once they leave the foster care system but former foster youth are reporting that is not happening. This gap in the intended purpose of the transition plan leaves a large area in which services can be revamped to better serve former foster youth. In order to do this further research needs to be done on when foster youth is actually having their transition plans created, who creates it with them, what questions are being asked during this collaboration, and what resources are being included in the transition plan.

Policy

This research study further explored the gap in services created by the transition plan and what are some of the possible limitations of the current transition plan form. As was reported in this research study, social workers are not meeting with their clients to properly discuss their transition plan. Others do not make a transition plan because it was not formally required of them. Others make a transition plan but do not follow it because it was not accurate to the former foster youths actual present needs. In order to minimize the gap in serves provided to former foster youth after they exist out of foster care, the foster youth have to create a comprehensive transition plan. Stricter policies on making social workers sit down with their clients to have a proper discussion and laws requiring social workers to provide them with resources to include in their plan would help make the plans more effective.

Practice

This research study found that in practice, the social workers greatly affects their clients. The number one suggested change to make their experience in the foster
care system better would have been more regular contact with their social worker. Social workers have to be more present for the children on their caseload and build that rapport with them. When collaborating to create the individual’s transition plan, catering their plan to what the individual actually wants is a way to meet this need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, current policies are not currently effective at helping former foster youth transition from the foster care system into young adulthood. Although small changes have been made over the past couple of decades, there are still many changes that have to be made. Such changes that were identified in this study include more regular contact with a social worker, more resources, actually doing transition plans with the clients, and actually engaging clients in independent living and transitional housing programs. In order to make more progress, further research has to be done in how to make current policies more effective at helping former foster youth transition from foster care to young adulthood and how to put that into practice.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questionnaire

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age (in years)?

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Prefer Not to Answer

3. What is your ethnicity?
   - White/Caucasian
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Black/African American
   - Native American/American Indian
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Other

4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
   - Less than a high school diploma
   - High school degree or equivalent
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctorate
   - Other
5. What is your current employment status?
   • Unemployed
   • Part-time (less than 40 hours a week)
   • Full-time (40+ hours a week)
   • Retired

6. What is your marital status?
   • Single (never married)
   • In a domestic partnership
   • Married
   • Divorced
   • Widowed

7. What county did you grow up in?
   • San Bernardino County
   • Riverside County
   • Los Angeles County
   • Orange County
   • Other

8. How many years were you in foster care (in years)?

9. What year did you exit foster care?

10. How old were you when you exited foster care (in years)?
Interview Questions:

11. Please describe your experience completing a Life Skills Assessment.

12. How did you find out about Independent Living or Transitional Living programs?

13. Please describe your experience participating in an Independent Living or a Transitional Living program.

14. Please tell me about your experience in developing an Independent Living Plan for yourself.

15. In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan helped you transition into young adulthood?

16. In what ways did you feel the Independent Living Plan could have been more helpful?

17. Please tell me about your experience developing a transition plan for your exit from foster care.

18. Please tell me about your your first year out of foster care.

19. How did you find housing during your first year out of the foster care system?

20. How did you find social support during your first year out of the foster care system?

21. Please tell me about your experience paying for college.

22. How did you obtain healthcare during your first year out of the foster care system?

23. Please tell me about how the foster care system treated you?

24. In what ways did you feel they could have treated you better?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine how effective current policy is at meeting the needs of foster youth aging out of the foster care system. The study is being conducted by Linda Murillo, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Anissa Rogers, 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 examine how effective current policy is at meeting the needs of foster youth aging out of the foster care system.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few demographic questions along with several open ended questions on their experiences with current policy when they were transitioning from foster care to young adulthood.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences. You may also choose to skip questions with which you may be uncomfortable.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only. DURATION: It will take 15 to 30 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, 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. Your participation is voluntary and participation or non-participation in the study will not affect your standing in the EOP at CSUSB.

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 Anissa Rogers at anissa.rogers@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 an X mark here ————

Date ————————————

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RESOURCES

There are minimal short-term risks involved from participating in this study. Although minimal, a potential short-term risk is that the questions being asked in the interview may trigger past trauma from the participant's experience in the foster care system. Should participants need counseling services, several referral resources are listed below. There are no longer term risks for participants.

CRISIS TEXT LINE: Text HOME to 741741
NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE: (800) 656-4673

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE: 988

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS:
Call (909) 421-9233, (760) 956-2345, or (909) 458-1517
Or text (909) 420-0560, (760) 734-8093, or (909) 535-1316

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS:
Merrill Center: (951) 643-2340 or Windsor Center: (909) 361-6470

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY CRISIS WALK-IN CENTERS:
Victorville: (760) 245-8837 or Yucca Valley: (760) 365-2233

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH 24 HOUR HELPLINE:
(800) 743-1478

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER 24 HOUR HELPLINE:
(800) 968-2636
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
September 6, 2022

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2022-90

Anissa Rogers Linda Murillo
CSBS - Social Work, Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Anissa Rogers Linda Murillo:

Your application to use human subjects, titled “Aging out of the System” 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. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-90 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
REFERENCES


