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EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH THAT PARTICIPATED IN EXTENDED FOSTER CARE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Background: Transitioning to adulthood poses significant obstacles for foster

youth adults, who encounter disproportionately elevated rates of homelessness,

school underperformance, unemployment, and mental health concerns in

comparison to their peers. Extended Foster Care (EFC) programs seek to tackle

these difficulties by offering assistance in housing, employment, and education.

However, there have been few systematic efforts to review the effectiveness of

the EFC program. ***Objective***: The purpose of this systematic review was to

identify, evaluate, and synthesize the empirical evidence on the educational

outcomes of foster youth who have participated in EFC. ***Methods***: This review

was conducted during the period November 2023 until December 2023 utilizing

two electronic databases: CSUSB OneSearch and Google Scholar. The following

keywords were used: (1) "Foster care" or "Former foster youth" or "Extended

Foster Care," (2) "aging out" or "impact of Extended Foster Care," and (3)

"Education" or "Educational Attainment." The reference lists of shortlisted articles

were also reviewed to identify additional articles. All searches were limited to

English-language publications with full-text availability. Articles included in this

review were published between 2013 and 2023. The participants in the

study included young adults who qualified for EFC. Studies

implementing quantitative research methodologies were included. ***Results***: Six

articles that evaluated the effectiveness of EFC on foster youth's educational

outcomes were identified. Findings from these studies indicate that EFC has a

beneficial impact on educational outcomes, namely by significantly boosting the rates of college enrollment among those who were previously in foster care. Although the EFC program has a beneficial effect on college enrollment, the long-lasting effects on persistence and degree completion are limited.

Conclusions: Given the benefits of EFC in educational outcomes, social workers can consider more proactively pushing for foster youth to receive EFC.

Keywords: Foster care; Former foster youth; Extended Foster Care; Aging out; Impact of Extended Foster Care.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the resilient foster youth whose stories inspire us to strive for a brighter future, your courage in navigating the complexities of the foster care system fuels our commitment to helping ourselves and others to understand and improve your experiences. To the researchers whose studies we analyzed, who have dedicated their efforts to shedding light on the challenges and successes of extended foster care, your work has been invaluable in understanding this unique group of individuals. This dedication also serves as a call to action for future researchers: there is still much more primary data needed to comprehensively measure the outcomes of extended foster care. Let us continue to advocate for the voices of foster youth and work tirelessly to ensure that they receive the support and opportunities they deserve.

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CHAPTER ONE

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the experience of children who have been a part of the foster care system. This chapter contains definitions of the problem, its incidence and prevalence, causes of the problem, and its impact. This is an important ethics topic as social workers are compelled by the ethical principles such as ethical principle 1: "Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems", ethical principle 2: "Social workers challenge social injustice" and ethical principle 3: "Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017).

Definition of the Problem

Foster care refers to the temporary placement of children in the care of individuals or families who are not their biological parents. Such an arrangement is typically due to circumstances such as abuse, neglect, or the inability of the biological parents to provide adequate care. The primary objective of foster care is to ensure that children and adolescents reside in secure and enduring family environments. The purpose of foster care is to be terminated once the biological parent or another kinship caregiver is capable of assuming responsibility for the child (Policy Circle, 2023).

Children and youth in foster care can be placed in a variety of settings. Frequently, children in foster care can be placed with capable and eager certified foster family homes. However, this is not applicable to some children who would be put with a relative, such as the child's maternal or paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or cousins. Cooley and Foster (2022) reported that at any given moment, 34% of foster children are placed with relatives, while 45% are placed with nonrelatives.

Prevalence of Foster Care

Approximately 700,000 children in the United States experience maltreatment annually, with millions more children being suspected of abuse or at significant danger (Font & Gersoff, 2020). The foster care system in the United States was examined in a recent study conducted in 2021. The study revealed that a total of 606,031 children were placed in foster care within a single year.

 According to the latest study published in 2021, it is anticipated that around 606,031 children transitioned through the foster care system in the United States within a span of one year. The amount of data provided by the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) encompasses the total amount of children who were already part of the system at the beginning of the federal fiscal year (October 1, 2020), as well as the count of children who joined the system throughout the subsequent 12-month period. As of September 30, 2021, the final day of the fiscal year, an estimated 391,098 children were in the care of foster parents (USA Facts, 2023).

Approximately 51% of children in foster care are male. Females constitute approximately 49%. According to the 2021 Census statistics, the gender distribution of children under 18 is as follows: boys make up 51% of the US population, while girls make up 49%. In 2001, the percentage of white and Black children in foster care was equal, with each group accounting for 38%. However, in 2002, a notable change occurred as the percentage of Black children in foster care decreased, while the percentage of white and Hispanic children increased (USA Facts, 2023).

In 2021, the number of white children in foster care was 43%. Both Black and Hispanic children formed 22% of the total population. A minority of foster care children, specifically 13%, self-identified as belonging to two or more racial backgrounds, including Asian, Native American or Pacific Islander, or of unknown ancestry. During the early 2000s, individuals between the ages of 15 and 20 were the largest age cohort in foster care. From 2003 to 2010, the average number of children in care fell within this age group at 28%. As of 2021, this category has experienced a decline, accounting for 19% of foster children (USA Facts, 2023).

Adolescents between the ages of 18 and 20 have the option to stay in foster care as long as they are attending school, participating in an employment program, employed, or unable to attend school or work due to a medical condition. Certain states permit the reintegration of young adults who departed

from foster care at the age of 18. The number of young adults aged 18-20 in foster care stood at 14,380 as of September 30, 2021.

Causes of Foster Care Placement

As previously stated, children are typically placed in foster care when their parents are deemed unable to provide adequate care for them, as decided by the child welfare agency. Various circumstances might contribute to an increased likelihood of child maltreatment, including alcohol/drug misuse, domestic violence, financial issues resulting in caregivers' failure to meet their children's basic requirements, insufficient housing, and caregiver impairment (provide citation).

Impact of Foster Care on Children and Youths

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is commonly regarded as an essential development which includes the attainment of abilities and connections essential for independent living. For adolescents in foster care, however, this shift offers a very different experience. Adolescents who have been in foster care face substantial barriers that impede their effective transition into adulthood, unlike their counterparts who have not experienced foster care.

Typically, adolescents who have not been in foster care possess the necessary skills to successfully transition into adulthood. However, this is not true for youths in foster care. Adolescents in foster care have a dearth of assistance and networks essential for their successful development into adulthood. Approximately 25,000 to 30,000 young individuals transition out of the foster care

system a year, often upon reaching the age of 18. A significant portion of children who reach the age of leaving foster care face various challenges. Specifically, 20% of these individuals experience homelessness, less than 3% manage to obtain a college degree by the age of 26, 60% of young women who age out find themselves involved in the sex industry, 25% of youth who age out struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 25% end up being incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care, and 70% of young women become pregnant by the age of 21 (Balistreri, 2023). The subsequent sections elaborate on these repercussions.

<u>Housing</u>

Frequently, young individuals who are approaching the age at which they are no longer in the care of the child welfare system express worries about their future living arrangements, given the high rates of homelessness among this population. The prevalence of homelessness among foster care adolescents is greater in comparison to youth from low-income homes and the general community (Rosenburg and Kim, 2017).

In a study conducted by Feng et al. (2020), it was reported that foster youth experience significantly elevated rates of homelessness in comparison to the overall youth population, with percentages ranging from 11% to 38%. Multiple factors contribute to the increased vulnerability of foster adolescents to homelessness. The placement history is of major significance, involving situations when a child has been removed from their biological home due to

behavioral or emotional problems, cases of running away from foster care, instability in placements, and residing in group care facilities. Moreover, some demographic and behavioral characteristics have been recognized as factors that raise the probability of experiencing homelessness. The factors include gender disparities, with males being more vulnerable than females, participation in delinquent behaviors, interaction with the juvenile justice system, family history of criminal activities, past experiences of victimization, display of physical symptoms indicating mental health disorders, and previous instances of homelessness.

Ensuring a secure and consistent living environment is crucial for foster youth. First, stable housing is needed in order to promote their academic achievement and overall well-being (Rosenburg and Kim, 2017). It seems that foster adolescents who become homeless after leaving the foster care system have a greater likelihood of developing mental health issues, being at a high risk of physical or sexual victimization and facing difficulties in accessing healthcare services (Dworsky et al., 2013).

Educational Attainment

Foster adolescents who have reached the age at which they are no longer eligible for support from the foster care system may have disadvantages in terms of their educational achievements when compared to youth who have never been in foster care (Fowler et al., 2018). Several educational challenges encompass repeating grades, mid-year school transfers, and a greater

prevalence of participation in special education programs than the general population (Liu et al., 2019). Multiple studies have demonstrated that adolescents in foster care who are expected to complete their education have a much lower graduation percentage compared to the overall population of young individuals (Fowler et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that young individuals in foster care have limited scholastic achievement, with high school dropout rates reaching as high as 50%, compared to the general population's dropout rate of around 11% (Rosenburg and Kim, 2017).

<u>Employment</u>

Young individuals who have been in foster care and are entering adulthood but have not completed high school or obtained a GED, are unlikely to possess the requisite qualifications and abilities to operate in a professional environment effectively (Fowler et al., 2018). According to a report by Rosenburg and Kim (2017), there is a correlation between the educational achievements of foster care youth and their level of employment in adulthood. This means that if foster care youth have poor academic performance and low rates of educational attainment, they are likely to have low levels of employment when they age out of the foster care system. The limited prospects for foster adolescents to secure job are worrisome, as it hampers their capacity to achieve financial autonomy and heightens their need for public support (Rosenburg and Kim, 2017).

Mental Health/Behavioral Health

Anxiety, depression, and PTSD are common mental health conditions that are frequently observed in foster adolescents. The experience of abuse, neglect, poor self-esteem, or the absence of a stable home environment, which are commonly seen in the foster care system, can significantly contribute to the emergence of many mental health problems (Better Help, 2023).

In the most up-to-date website that reports statistics for children in foster care, in particular on mental health, it was reported that foster children are shown to face considerable mental health difficulties, with as many as 80% of them encountering such obstacles, which is a striking difference compared to the national standard of 20%. In addition, people who were once in foster care are more likely to be affected by PTSD, exhibiting rates that are about five times greater than those reported in the general adult population. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) emphasizes the seriousness of the mental health challenges faced by foster children. They point out that these children often depend on psychotropic medications as a way to manage the impacts of complex trauma, even though these prescriptions come with inherent risks of negative side effects. Furthermore, data from the Department of Justice reveals a troubling pattern in which 18% of state inmates have a background of living in foster families or institutions throughout their early years, highlighting the complex difficulties experienced by individuals with a history of foster care (USA Facts, 2023).

Macro-Level Response

The Foster Care Independence Act, passed in 1999, is one of the most comprehensive laws aimed at addressing the challenges foster youths were likely to endure as they embark on their journey to transition out of the foster care system. The Act helps youth from the age of 18 till the age of 21 in order to help them make a smooth transition from foster care to adulthood. Assembly 12 became effective on January 1, 2012, following its September 30, 2010, enactment. Established by California's AB 12, the Extended Foster Care (EFC) Program permits qualifying youth in the probation and child welfare systems to stay in foster care up until they turn 21. This program helps to reduce the barriers and adverse repercussions that foster youth experience after they leave the child welfare system by proactively supporting them in creating and achieving their primary goals to live an independent life.

Foster Care Independence Act

The Independent Living Initiative Program, which was founded in 1986, was substituted by the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and renamed the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program in honor of the late Senator Chafee, who was the legislation's author. The Foster Care Independence Act increased government funding for initiatives aimed at assisting foster youth to develop the skills needed for self-sufficiency substantially. To address the pre- and post-emancipation needs of foster care youth, the Foster Care

Independence Act completely enhanced funding from $70 million to $140 million (Foster Care Independence Act, 1999).

The major provisions of the Foster Care Independence Act were raising the age of eligibility to 21 and allocating a portion of the money for youth and young adults who had aged out of the previous ILP, which focused predominantly on those between the ages of 16 and 18. States were now required to subsidize the training of people who were assisting the lives of foster youth in order to aid them more effectively in preparing for life as independent adults. It was also expected of youth to take part in planning their own case plan activities and to contribute to the process of developing their own planned program. Unlike the former ILP program, which failed to reimburse them for room and board expenses, youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who were in care at the age of 18 are now qualified for those expenses. Since services may be used in conjunction with adoption programs and other permanency programs, the previous ILP effort did not account for this possibility, and independent living activities were not considered as an alternative for achieving the objective of permanence for youth in foster care. Youths ages 18 to 21 are now eligible for Medicaid benefits even though they had aged out of care; under the prior ILP project, they did not qualify for extended Medicaid services after the age of 18. According to Aguirre (2009), Child Welfare League of America (1999), Foster Care Independence Act (1999), and additional sources, there is a greater need for resources to support foster care youth with higher education assistance,

vocational and employment training, prevention of substance abuse, prevention

of pregnancy, health-preventive activities, and connecting youth with influential

adults who can act as mentors and role models who are inspiring for them.

Extended Foster Care (AB 12)

The California assembly law, which was passed in 2010 and put into effect

in 2012, sought the establishment of extending foster care for all children placed

in foster care. The goal of Extended Foster Care (EFC) is to help youth who are

depending on others to make a seamless transition into contributing members of

society. Foster youths in the probation department and child welfare system who

were in foster care when they turned 18 are eligible for EFC assistance

(California Department of Social Services, 2023).

As a voluntary program, EFC requires the former foster youth to sign a

mutual agreement committing the obligations connected with participating. This

involves reporting any major changes to the case manager and staying in

monthly contact with them. Before the age of 18, a Transitional Independent

Living Plan (TILP) that ensures the possible beneficiary will meet at least one of

the following requirements must also be established: completing a GED or other

diploma that is equivalent to a high school diploma; enrolling in a college or

vocational program; working at least 80 hours per month; and participating in a

program that lowers barriers to employment or promotes employment (Walker, K.

L., 2016). The goal of EFC is to provide each former foster youth the freedom to

choose their housing, employment opportunity, and path to education while also

offering ongoing assistance and guidance should hardships surface up until the age of 21.

<p style="text-align:center">Mezzo-Level Response</p>

Foster youth programs for older adolescents are crucial because these adolescents require direction and support as they transition to becoming adults. The aforementioned form of living is transitional housing. State of California's Transitional Housing Placement Program for Minor Foster Children (THPP-M), Transitional Housing Placement Program for Non-Minor Dependent (THPP NMD), and Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) are among the programs that provide support to older youth in foster care (Department of Social Services, n.d.).

Youth in foster care between the ages of 16 and 18 are eligible for the Transitional Housing Placement Program for Minor Foster Children (THPP-M). As they establish an atmosphere of security and educational skills aimed at promoting self-sufficiency, THPP-M seeks to assist foster youth in effectively emancipating. Achieving the objectives specified in the youth's Transitional Independent Living Plan, career counseling, and academic guidance are merely a few of the skills and supportive services delivered (Department of Social Services, n.d.).

Assembly Bill (A.B.) established the Transitional Housing Placement Program for Non-Minor Dependent (THPP NMD), which offers housing placement alternatives to non-minor dependents enrolled in Extended Foster

Care. With the help of this placement alternative, youth can acquire the skills necessary to make the transition to independent living. These skills include helping them achieve their educational objectives, finding work, and learning how to manage their finances, relationships, and everyday living (Department of Social Services, n.d.).

In conclusion, there's the Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus). Youth who have aged out of foster care on or after their eighteenth birthday are eligible for this transitional housing program. For a total of thirty-six months or until the participants turn twenty-five, this program provides housing and supportive assistance. THP-Plus is dedicated to helping young adults acquire the life skills necessary to live freely as well as outlining the objectives and goals required to make the transition from youth to adulthood. A Transitional Independent Living Plan (Department of Social Services, n.d.) is implemented by the youth, social workers, and any relevant support system in establishing goals and objectives.

Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter highlighted the lived experiences of youth in foster care, including how they entered the system and what the procedure entails. While it is usually the intention for children to reunite with their families when they are placed in foster care, most of these youth remain in the system until they are eighteen and transitioning into adulthood. The chapter gave an overview of

macro and mezzo-level interventions for foster youth preparing to transition out of

the foster care system and aspiring for self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the outcomes of foster youth who participated in the EFC program. It will discuss the education, housing, and employment outcomes of foster adolescents who participated in the EFC program. This chapter will also further evaluate and assess the knowledge gaps and areas in need of additional analysis and study.

Education

Courtney and Hook (2017) review the effectiveness of EFC in meeting the housing, employment, and educational needs of youth preparing to exit foster care. According to the Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008, states can extend foster care services to youth up to age 21 with federal funds. The same authors, however, report that each additional year a youth was in care after turning 18 increased the odds of attending at least some college by 46%, simultaneously reducing the odds of youth not completing high school (Courtney & Hook, 2017). These results mean that EFC positively affected educational outcomes for foster youth. In fairness to the work of Courtney and Hook (2017), they had no direct judgment of the housing and employment outcomes of EFC, so it would be important to take into account the body of work brought by other researchers to come to an understanding of the efficacy of EFC.

In addition, studies need to explore the variability in service delivery models and best practices, which will help increase the success of EFC programs nationwide. This study offers compelling evidence supporting the positive effects of EFC on educational outcomes, but further investigation is required to understand its influence on housing and employment prospects fully.

Courtney et al. (2021) provided a detailed analysis of how EFC will likely affect various life outcomes for youth at age 23. Courtney et al. (2021) drew upon two primary types of data: state administrative data and survey data from California foster youth. The study provided findings showing various positive outcomes EFC holds on youth's lives, even following two years or more from the completion of foster care. Courtney et al. (2021) present research on the benefits of EFC to outcomes of youth in their early adult years after exiting foster care. Courtney et al. (2021) used advanced statistical methodologies to evaluate the effect of EFC. They noted the limitations in studying the large, expected impact of EFC on certain outcomes because EFC is new in California. It identifies that EFC had a differential effect on gender and race/ethnicity for some outcomes. The authors are set to admit that, just like in other states, young adult outreach in California could be better (Courtney et al., 2021). The report then goes into greater detail about analyzing the relationship between time in extended care and youths' outcomes after controlling for a statistically wide range of youth characteristics available in each dataset and characteristics of the county where youths were placed.

Housing

Okpych et al. (2018) provided details about the living situations and social support of foster youth in the era of EFC. Therefore, this study sought to establish the effectiveness of EFC in meeting the needs of foster children in terms of housing, employment, or education.

The data comes from a survey that draws a basis from mixed methods, pooling, and qualitative data from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH). The size of the study's sample includes 611 participants who have completed both wave 1 and wave 2 interviews (Okpych et al., 2018). The study found that most foster youth in EFC resided in supervised independent living placements (SILPs) or transitional housing placements (THPs). SILPs offer foster youth the most autonomy and independence, while THPs offer various psychoeducational, independent living skills, employment readiness, and other interventions in preparation for adulthood. Okpych et al. (2018) also found that foster youth rely on multiple sources of support, including but not limited to relatives, peers, professionals, and foster families.

The study further reveals the role played by different forms of social support, majorly emotional, tangible, and informational support, in helping foster youth transition into the adult stage. Okpych et al. (2018) found that EFC may increase the proportion of youth who remain in care beyond age 18. These findings imply that EFC has an impact on youth outcomes. Some areas for improvement of the study included that it relied on self-reported data and that the

population was only based in California. Research should be conducted to find EFC's effectiveness in providing housing, employment, or education for foster children in other states and countries.

Stokes and Montes (2015) used a quantitative approach in the form of a newly created questionnaire to survey young adults in EFC and the Aftercare Program currently or formerly receiving foster care services through Walden Family Services and ASPIRAnet in San Bernardino County. This research involved 72 young adults, aged 18 and over. In this study, the effectiveness of programs to meet foster children's housing, employment, and educational needs were studied.

Stokes and Montes (2015) show that the majority of young adults reported they had been in EFC for less than 6 months and that major topics the young adults said learning in EFC were maintaining housing, budgeting money, applying to college/vocational school, opening a savings/checking account, and using public transportation (Stokes & Montes, 2015). Most young adults indicated they used their social worker to obtain information about EFC. Overall, twenty-nine young adults reported that they 'Strongly Agree' EFC has helped them take care of themselves. According to the study results, the Independent Living Program (ILP) helped thirty-seven young adults, and the topics mostly reported learned through the ILP were in the ILP. The study makes clear ways through which the best design of programs to meet the housing, employment, and

educational needs of foster children and highlights the importance of the perceptions of the youth in the evaluation of program effectiveness.

Employment

Research conducted in the past has repeatedly shown that between the ages of 18 and 21, former foster youth who have aged out of foster care encounter high rates of unemployment and poor earnings.

The primary objective of Stewart et al. (2014) was employment outcomes for age-out youth sequentially up to age 30 using linked administrative data on child welfare, earnings, and public assistance from three states: California, Minnesota, and North Carolina. According to the primary research findings, foster youth who age out of foster care at the age of 24 in all three states and through the age of 30 in North Carolina fail to succeed compared to their peers in terms of employment rates, incomes, and work stability. Although the majority of age-out foster youth had some working experience between the ages of 18 and 24, their employment rates at 24 were, on average, 6% to 12% lower across states compared to that of youth with low incomes and 27% to 31% lower than the national comparison group (Stewart et al., 2014).

Furthermore, studies in all three states indicate that previous work experience acquired before the age of eighteen has a positive impact on employment outcomes in the mid-to late-20s. In addition, the findings showed that in two of the studied states, former foster youth who remain in care longer than those who do not have greater potential for employment outcomes (Stewart

et al., 2014). Notably, it was further suggested despite federal and state efforts ought to focus on extending foster care to include adolescents up to the age of 21. The realization is that foster youth continue to struggle with low rates of employment and poor salaries yielding that continuous efforts to extend the qualifying age to age 30 are still warranted.

Gaps in Knowledge

This chapter provides a thorough assessment of the results of foster youth who have taken part in the EFC program, specifically examining their accomplishments in education, housing, and employment. Although previous research emphasizes the beneficial effects of EFC on these outcomes, there are still major gaps in our understanding. There is a specific lack of thorough awareness about the variations in service delivery models and best practices within EFC programs, which makes it difficult to assess their effectiveness across the United States. In addition, there is a lack of extensive study on the lasting impact of EFC on educational achievement, especially beyond the first phase of enrolling in post-secondary school. Moreover, there is a significant lack of research comparing former foster adolescents who left the foster care system due to causes other than reaching the age limit. This prevents a comprehensive analysis of the factors that affect educational achievements within this group. Therefore, more research is necessary to fill these knowledge gaps and offer a thorough understanding of the educational experiences of foster youth in EFC programs.

Aim of Study

This study aimed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize the empirical evidence on

the educational outcomes of foster youth who have participated in EFC.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This review was conducted during the period November 2023 until

December 2023 utilizing two electronic databases (CSUSB SCHOLAR works,

Google Scholar) that were searched using the following terms: (1) "Foster care"

or "Former foster youth" or "Extended Foster Care" and (2) "aging out" or "impact

of Extended Foster Care". All articles and literature were manually evaluated for

further pertinent research that met the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

All searches were limited to English-language publications with full-text

availability. To provide an overview of the information that has been acquired

during the last ten years, all articles were limited to publication years between

2013 and 2023. The participants in the study included young adults who qualified

for EFC, that is, participants 17 years and older were included, with a maximum

age of 30 years old. Studies implementing quantitative research methodologies

were included, as quantitative data is more concrete than qualitative data in

demonstrating the influence of EFC participation on long-term outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE

Research evaluating the impact of EFC on education remains limited, highlighting the need for a comprehensive review to understand its implications fully. This chapter aims to provide a systematic analysis of existing research on this subject, emphasizing the importance of grasping the nuances of EFC and its benefits for young adults. The methodology and findings of relevant studies are presented herein, starting with examinations of EFC effectiveness, followed by investigations into other interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes for foster youth. By delineating both similarities and differences across studies, this review aims to shed light on the effectiveness of EFC and related interventions in enhancing postsecondary educational outcomes among youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

Effectiveness of the EFC

Enrollment in Postsecondary Education

Courtney and Okpych (2017) examined the association between months in foster care past age 18 and the likelihood of enrolling in college by around age 20. The first and second waves of youth interviews for Cal YOUTH, (Cal YOUTH assesses how the California Fostering Connections to Success Act affects outcomes as foster youth transition into adulthood), administrative records from California's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), and college enrollment records from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)

provided the data used in this research and supplemented by self-report data on college enrollment collected at age 19 and 20 years old. The sample size included 600 youth between 16.75 and 17.75 years old who had spent at least six months in the California foster care system when initially interviewed in 2013. Two indicators of educational success were measured in this study: secondary and postsecondary education attainment. The secondary education component was determined by asking youths in follow-up interviews if they had earned a GED, high school diploma, or other secondary credential. The National Student Clearinghouse provided college enrollment records in early 2016 when the participants were 19 or 20 years old. These records were used to calculate postsecondary educational attainment, and they were augmented with self-report information gathered during the follow-up interviews. The results found that each additional year in care increased the expected odds of college enrollment by a factor of 1.8 after controlling for a wide range of demographic attributes, characteristics of participants' educational background and foster care histories, and other risk and protective factors. These findings demonstrated that the new policy, which permits young adults to stay in care longer, was linked to a number of advantages for young people. Notably, young adults who stayed in care had a significantly higher chance of earning a secondary credential and going on to college than adolescents who were released from care.

Courtney and Okpych's (2021) conducted a follow-up study where they gathered information from a third set of interviews conducted when the

participants from CalYOUTH were, on average, 21 years old. This third study

drew a representative sample of about 13,500 young people who had been in

California foster care for at least six months on or after their 16th birthday

between 2006 and 2015. It should be noted that this sample included youth in

care before and after the state had enacted its extended care law. This study

drew data from state administrative child welfare data, which was linked to

National Student Clearinghouse data to assess the impact of EFC on three

postsecondary education outcomes by age 21: enrollment in college, persistence

in college, and the number of credits completed. Using an instrumental variable

approach and after controlling for a wide range of youth characteristics, foster

care history background characteristics, and county-level factors, the authors

estimated that each year in care increased the expected probability of enrolling in

college by about 8.5 percentage points. EFC was not found to impact the other

two college outcomes for college entrants: persistence through two semesters

and number of semesters enrolled. Although this is the most rigorous evaluation

of extended foster care policy to date, the authors caution that the findings

should be interpreted as early evidence since the policy was relatively new in

California (Courtney et al., 2018). Moreover, this study relied exclusively on NSC

data, which has problems with blocked records (e.g., about 10% of participants

who verily enrolled in college were not listed in the NSC data. In summary, this

study affirms previous findings by demonstrating the positive impacts of extended

foster care on several key outcomes during early adulthood, even two years after the participants had exited care.

In contrast, while Courtney and Okpych (2021) focused on assessing the impact of EFC on postsecondary education outcomes in California, Courtney and Hook (2017) conducted a study examining the relationship between EFC and educational attainment in midwestern states like Iowa and Wisconsin. Their study's aims included investigating whether the positive effects of EFC on educational attainment extended after the individual left foster care. The authors also examined the effect of additional time spent in foster care above 18 years on educational attainment across different states. The study utilized a longitudinal research design by following the children from age 17 and after exiting foster care. The participants included 17- and 18-year-old teenagers with at least one year of experience living in out-of-home care under the supervision of public welfare agencies. The study excluded individuals with learning disabilities, living out-of-state, incarcerated, or committed to a psychiatric facility, leaving a sample size of 732 study participants. Courtney and Hook (2017) operationalized the dependent variable of educational attainment based on levels of education. It included some high school, completed high school, and one or more years in college. The researchers found that increased time spent in foster care, up to 21 years, was associated with higher educational attainment. According to the results, every additional year spent in EFC over 18 years was associated with a 46% increase in the likelihood of advancing to the next level of educational

attainment by age 26. Additionally, those who left foster care at age 21 were more likely to complete high school and attend college compared to those who left at 18 years. The authors also found that EFC youth in Illinois had higher educational attainment than those in Iowa and Wisconsin. Overall, Courtney and Hook (2017) claim that EFC helps create a positive environment characterized by protective factors that promote development and encourage education.

Postsecondary Education Persistence and Completion

Courtney and Hook (2017) explored EFC's lasting effects on education post-foster care, while Okpych and Courtney (2020) focused on EFC's impact on post-high school educational attainment. Both studies followed foster youth longitudinally from age 17, assessing EFC's influence on education, with varying outcomes regarding persistence and degree completion. Okpych and Courtney (2020) investigated the relationship between extended foster care (EFC) and post-high school educational attainment. They evaluated the effect of additional time spent in foster care on educational attainment variables, such as college enrollment, persistence with college, and college completion or degree attainment. The study implemented a longitudinal approach, which involves following a cohort of foster children from age 17 and older as they experience EFC and attend school. The study utilized secondary data collected from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth and covered Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Participants were supposed to have lived in foster care for a year before their 17th birthday and must be residing within the three

midwestern states. The sample size included 732 participants at the time of the first baseline interview. In this study, they measured educational attainment through three significant metrics: college enrollment at age 21, persistence with college education at age 21, and degree attainment or college completion at ages 29 and 30. Okpych and Courtney (2020) found that EFC was associated with an increase in college enrollment, but it did not have a significant association with persistence with college education and degree attainment. In fact, each additional year over 18 contributed to an 8.5% increase in college enrollment. This favorable finding may be explained by the increased stability from EFC and interactions with adult professionals who may encourage adolescents in foster care to pursue a college education. However, Okpych and Courtney (2020) found little to no effect on persistence and degree completion. These outcomes can be attributed to the unique challenges that foster children may experience, such as poor academic performance and lack of financial support. Therefore, EFC can lead to increased college enrollment, but more effort is necessary to promote persistence and degree completion.

Effectiveness of Other Interventions

There is currently a shortage of research in this area of study, despite the completion of certain studies on the academic outcomes of adolescents in EFC. Consequently, in light of how crucial it is to comprehend what the results of EFC were, the subsequent paragraphs will shed light on the extra resources that EFC youngsters are provided. The paragraphs that follow provide a thorough analysis

of the educational results of foster children who get assistance after leaving

foster care, whether through enrollment in EFC, the issuance of educational and

training vouchers (ETVs), or involvement in campus-support programs (CSPs).

Postsecondary Enrollment

      Geiger and Okpych (2022) completed a longitudinal design study where

participants were interviewed in 2014 (when they turned 17), 2016 (when they

turned 19), and 2018 (when they turned 21). Participants were determined to be

foster youth in Washington D.C. and other US states. This study examined

whether state-level policies and programs (EFC, ETV expenditure, FCIA

expenditure, and state tuition waiver), youth-level policy/service receipt (e.g.,

career preparation services, employment preparation services), and youth

characteristics (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity) impact youths' connection to

employment and education at age 21. The number of youths participating in the

study is 7,797, selected from various states across the United States (Geiger &

Okpych, 2021). The diverse group of people with foster care backgrounds

provides a pool of information to study the obstacles and situations faced by

youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The levels of educational

achievement are measured by whether the participants have completed high

school with a diploma or GED or not and if they are enrolled in higher education.

Furthermore, receiving financial aid for education and support services for

postsecondary studies are viewed as signs of involvement in educational

opportunities. The study found that by the age of 21, 70% of these youth were

either in school, working, or both (Geiger & Okpych, 2021). Few state policies

had an impact on their connection to education and employment except for the

presence of state tuition waivers, which positively influenced their enrollment in

postsecondary education and employment. Factors like time spent in extended

foster care and participation in education programs had an impact on the

connection. Youths with intellectual or medical challenges had lower chances of

being connected (Geiger & Okpych, 2021). Gender differences influenced

connectedness, with females being more likely to be both employed and enrolled

(Geiger & Okpych, 2021). These results indicate that support systems and

inclusive policies help smooth out the transition to adulthood for youth from foster

care backgrounds by addressing their needs and breaking down systemic

obstacles.

Postsecondary Education Persistence

Okpych, et al. (2020) administered a longitudinal design to determine the

roles of Campus-Support Programs (CSPs) and Education and Training

Vouchers (ETVs) on college persistence for youth with foster care histories.

Participants were interviewed in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Transition-age foster

youth from California who were enrolled in college and part of the California

Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH) were involved in the study. To

be eligible, participants had to be in foster care in California as of December

2012, aged between 16.75 and 17.75, and have been in foster care for a

minimum of six months (Okpych et al., 2020). Additionally, the research aims to

explore how Campus Support Programs (CSPs) and Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) influence the persistence of college attendance for youth with backgrounds in foster care. The sample for this analysis comprises 401 youths from the CalYOUTH longitudinal youth study who had enrolled in college (Okpych et al., 2020). College persistence was measured by determining whether a youth remained enrolled through their first two consecutive non-summer semesters in college, either on a full-time or part-time basis. The researchers found that both CSPs and ETVs significantly increased the likelihood of youth with foster-care backgrounds staying in college. Specifically, students who were recipients of ETVs were three times more inclined to continue their college education compared to those without ETV support (Okpych et al., 2020). Similarly, taking part in CSPs showed a correlation with a higher chance of college persistence (Okpych et al., 2020). These results indicate that support programs and financial aid play important roles in promoting the educational achievements of youth from foster care backgrounds, emphasizing the necessity of tailored interventions and resources to enhance college persistence among this vulnerable group.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study systematically reviewed the empirical evidence on the educational outcomes of foster youth who have participated in EFC or received additional interventions aimed at improving their educational outcomes. We analyzed studies published on the educational effects of EFC in the Midwest and California. Overall, the empirical evidence unequivocally shows that spending longer time in EFC increases the likelihood of college enrollment but does not affect college persistence and completion. However, foster youth who participated in CSPs or received ETVs had higher rates of college persistence.

The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between the duration of EFC and secondary and postsecondary educational outcomes. According to studies, the amount of time spent in EFC is critical in strengthening the likelihood of adolescent completion of secondary education and enrollment in postsecondary education. For example, Courtney and Okpych (2021) found that each additional year in care enhanced foster youth's probability of pursuing college education by around 8.5 percent. Furthermore, studies evaluating the effectiveness of additional interventions in the form of ETVs and CSPs revealed that these resources considerably enhanced the likelihood that youth with foster care backgrounds would continue their college education (Okpych et al., 2020). Research evaluating the EFC program demonstrated that while remaining in care was linked to a greater likelihood of completing college

by the age of 23, persistence in attending college and earning a degree was not significantly correlated (Nathanael J., et al., 2019).

Limitations

Findings from this study should be viewed with the following limitations in mind. First, the findings have limited generalizability, as the studies found for this research focused only on four different states. Another limitation is the complexity of outcomes such as educational attainment, which are influenced by numerous factors beyond extended foster care, making it difficult to isolate the specific impact of EFC.

Implications

Based on these findings, it is imperative that social workers actively and aggressively promote EFC to foster youth as it will heighten their possibilities to pursue a higher education. Social service providers ought to increase awareness and educate foster youth about the opportunities and requirements about the EFC program, as well as the many resources that are available to them. In order to support foster youth in attaining a secondary education, it is necessary to look into ways that EFC could be enhanced, expanded, and/or accompanied with additional resources. It is fundamental that foster youth achieve a secondary education given that it minimizes barriers to homelessness and other disparities in outcomes. It is strongly encouraged that additional research be undertaken in diverse states, concentrating on the effects of EFC in states other than the Midwest and California.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This research project was completed as a collaboration between two partners: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez. The following sections were completed as follows:

1. Written Report and Presentation of Findings

    a. Abstract: Kassandra Mayorga

    b. Acknowledgments: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez

    c. Chapter One. Introduction: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez

    d. Chapter Two. Literature Review: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez

    e. Chapter Three. Methods: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez

    f. Chapter Four. Results: Kassandra Mayorga

    g. Chapter Five. Discussion: Roxana Sanchez

2. Supplemental Materials

    Formatting and Edits: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez

3. Presentation of Findings: Kassandra Mayorga and Roxana Sanchez