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Social support among emancipated foster youth

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SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG 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

Nicole Anita Hart

Maria Johnson

June 2002

SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH
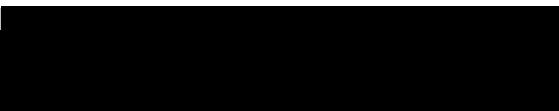
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ABSTRACT

This quantitative research study focused on social support and its connection to emancipated foster youths' preparedness for adulthood. Data was obtained from sixty-nine respondents participating in Independent Living Skills Programs located in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Information obtained from the youth examined preparedness for adulthood as well as frequency and availability of social support.

The results of the study indicated a relationship between availability of social support and preparedness, signifying that social support has some positive impact on favorable preparedness among emancipated foster youth. Being aware of the importance social support has in the growth and development of emancipated foster youth can motivate social workers to better understand what or whom foster youth consider as a means of social support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

Mom-

You have been in my life through inception, struggles and discord. I dedicate this project to you to recognize the contribution you have had in my successes. I am thankful that you and God are the center of my existence. I love you and am grateful that you are my mother and largest supporter.

Nicole A. Hart

Crucita-

Mi madre, mi todo, como puedo agradecerte todo lo que has hecho por mi? Los sacrificios que hiciste para satisfacer, no solamente mis necesidades, sino tambien, mis deseos. Como puedo corresponder a todo tu cuidado por mi? Tu constante preocupacion, no solamente por mi bienestar, sino tambien, por mi felicidad? Como puedo decirte cuanto te respeto y te aprecio? Yo se que te lo debo todo no solamente todo lo que tengo, sino tambien, todo lo que soy. Por innumerables razones de dedico este proyecto por lo qual no viera sido possible sin ti.

Maria Johnson

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The contents of Chapter One presents an overview of the issues concerning social support among emancipated foster youth. The problem statement, policy, and practice context are discussed followed by the purpose of the study. Finally, the implications of the project for social work are presented.

Problem Statement

More than 100,000 children wake up every morning in a bed other than their own (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). The number of children in the foster care system has tripled since 1983. Nationwide, 545,000 children are in foster care; of them, thirty percent are teenagers and only two to three percent will ever be adopted (Marks, 2000).

As the number of children entering foster care grows, the numbers of those who are becoming emancipated also increases. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, during the period of October 1999 trough March 2000, there were 26,886 youth preparing to leave foster care and assume adult status in society (CIS/Annual Survey, 1986). Although assistance for current and former

foster youth ages 16 and older is available to help in the transition to independent living, there are no guarantees foster youth are being given the training or resources they will need to become self-sufficient in their adult lives.

Many years after one turns eighteen, he still finds himself dependent on his parents, other members of his family and the community at large. Emancipated foster youth have no such outlets. Their family members have often failed to improve their lives (Ayasse, 1995). In turn, when foster youth come of age, it is difficult for them to go out into the world and successfully be independent.

A number of foster children enter and stay in the system until they reach the age of eighteen. Foster care eligibility generally is terminated at the age of eighteen and sometimes extended to nineteen under special circumstances (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). In many foster youth service agencies, such as Riverside County's, transitional services are offered, but the services still fall short of reaching their goal, assisting emancipated foster youth with living independently (Riverside County Office of Education, 1999).

Policy Context

Foster care is a topic addressed in the field of social work. Due to the increased attention to foster children and their treatment in the system, a number of legislative changes have been made. In 1986, the United States government enacted the Independent Living Initiative. The legislative framework was created for states to develop services adolescents should receive before the state discharged them from foster care (CIS 1986).

In addition, in 1998, Senate Bill 933 was created. This bill houses rules and regulations of foster care service programs particularly academic, behavior, medical, psychological and transitional services. Transitional services include vocational training, independent living skills and emancipation assistance (Riverside County Office of Education, 1999). Although the bill exists, many inconsistencies still take place in practice.

The foster care system is so complex that resources cannot be used where research indicates they can and should be used (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). Many group home providers are aware of the resources but do not choose to utilize them (Moss, 2000). With inconsistencies in foster children's placements as well as legislative

shortcomings, support for foster youth continues to remain inadequate.

It is essential to understand the problems in the system in order to assist foster youth to forge a sufficient level of functioning in the world. A study conducted in Wisconsin, by the Little Hoover Commission showed that twelve to eighteen months after leaving foster care, most youth experienced significant problems managing their lives (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). Many emancipated foster youth fell prey to victimization, abuse or ended up in the criminal justice system (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). A large number of emancipated foster youth are not chronologically, educationally, emotionally or socially ready to enter the world independently (Messinga, 1999).

Some ideas proposed by the government are to extend the age for foster youth support from eighteen to twenty-one. Recent legislation, HR 1802 and HR 3443, have been set in motion to expand transitional services to prepare foster youth to live independently. Emancipated youth will have health care, be able to maintain a larger amount of money in their checking accounts (ranging from $1,000 to $10,000) and have access to room and board. With

this legislation, independent living program funds will also double (Allred, 1999; Marks, 2000).

<u>Practice Context</u>

The profession of social work has long recognized the significance of an individual's social support system. Barker (1987) describes social support as a unified network of people, resources and organizations that give emotional and material assistance, playing a paramount role in one's ability to function. Support from families and parents have been widely recognized in the literature as paramount to child adjustment (Vernberg, LaCreca, Silverman, & Prinstein, 1996). Less is known about the role social support plays in the life of emancipated foster youth. Upon their eighteenth birthday, foster youth are discharged from their caregiver's custody to independence. Far too often the graduates of the American child-welfare system become America's homeless, prisoners, public-assistance recipients and psychiatric patients (Barth & Barry, 1997).

Due to various stress factors being associated with living on one's own, having social support systems will better prepare emancipated foster youth for independent living. It is important for social service workers to encourage youth to form networks. Incorporating network

building in the curriculum of the Independent Living Skills Program would also be instrumental in helping foster youth forge relationships.

The lack of social support for the emancipated foster youth population can result in societal concerns, regarding the well being of generations to follow. Local, state and federal government entities as well as society as a whole are concerned because when emancipated foster youth are unable to make it as a functioning individual in society, some end up resorting to illegal activity such as drug use, theft or prostitution (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). Particularly, for social service practitioners who have to deal with working in a system full of inconsistencies, loopholes and overload, provides a level of frustration and disappointment in assisting the foster youth population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not having social support serves as a tool of encouragement for youth to become skilled in areas preparing them for adulthood. Variables addressing areas, such as completing an education, locating and maintaining adequate housing and successfully maintaining a budget

were examined. The study was crucial for identifying whether there was an association between having social support and being prepared for adulthood. Determining whether social support better prepares emancipated foster youth for independence can be helpful in preventing them from transitioning out of foster care into the welfare system.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The significance of this project for social work practice is to assist social workers and other social service practitioners in working toward finding solutions for improving the current system as well as forging ways for foster youth to have a true transition into the world. With this in mind, further research is necessary for assessment of the importance of social support in relation to the emancipated foster youth population. Since direct practice social workers are often charged with the responsibility of helping clients develop improved coping skills and because social support often plays a part in these interventions, research explaining the relationship of social support and emancipated foster youth's success is important.

Knowing if foster youth have social support networks would help social workers understand whether or not they will fare better in tasks such as educational achievement, the ability to balance a budget and finding adequate housing. It may also help social work professionals improve intervention techniques with the population. Knowledge of the importance of social support allows the social worker to advocate for acquiring and maintaining positive relationships. The research question for this study was "Does access to social support better prepare emancipated foster youth for adulthood.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of literature relevant to the emancipated foster youth population. Theories guiding conceptualization with regards to adolescents and their behavior in the social environment are specified. Deficits in the system as well as the need for social support research are also discussed.

Human Behavior in the Social
Environment Theories Guiding
Conceptualization

There is limited information on how social support affects the lives of emancipated foster youth after they are released from the foster-care system. Schneider (1991) notes that from birth, infants know how to interact with others and his initial relationships with chief individuals are essential in intuitive development. In childhood and early adolescence, parents are a child's ·central network. Although interaction with peers is important for social functioning, the relationship children have with their parents is most significant during this period (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000). Young people growing up in out-of-home care, many without

the advantage of a stable home environment, have limited opportunities to learn life skills in the typical way (Mallon, 1998).

Other theorists have hypothesized that foster children are at considerable risk of developing insecure attachments (Marcus, 1991). Without the necessary elements to form secure attachments, it is possible that foster youth will encounter difficulty learning how to form networks because of their lack of secure attachments. Foster youth exiting the child-welfare system need skills to help them form and maintain social support networks, which can prove to be a fundamental element of life success.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence is viewed as a transitional period involving numerous changes, including a reorganization of social relations with parents and peers (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983). In the course of adolescence, relations with peers assume increasing importance. Friends gradually come into the relational network once reserved for parents alone. In research on social support, during adolescence, the perceived support from parents either remained constant or decreased, whereas the support from peers increased (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000).

Historically, adolescence has been viewed to be a highly turbulent developmental phase. This life phase is often characterized by heightened parent-adolescent conflict. Perspectives that are more recent have suggested that parent-adolescent relationships remain supportive and emotionally significant because parents often facilitate adolescents in coping with stressful transitional events (Brook, Brook, Gordon, Whiteman, & Cohen, 1990). Moreover, several research studies have indicated that adolescents' strong emotional ties with social support networks are associated with higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Burke & Weir, 1979; Hoelter & Harper, 1987), and lower levels of, or delayed entry into substance use (Brook et al., 1990; Wills & Vaughn, 1989). Foster youth who lack attachment to their caregivers must learn to create networks from alternative sources. Additionally Procidano and Heller (1983) suggest that high perceived family social support is an important dimension that is inversely related to distress and psychopathological symptoms.

All young people must absorb a tremendous amount of knowledge to function self-sufficiently in society. For the majority of adolescents learning life skills occurs both formally and informally over a period of years within

the family setting. Those who grow up in out-of-home care often lack the advantage of a stable home environment and have limited opportunities to learn life skills in the typical way (Mallon, 1998).

According to Ryan (1998), adolescents leaving the foster care system lack the necessary social skills required to meet their day-to-day needs. Furthermore, Ryan (1998) states that there is little systematic effort made to use foster parents to provide foster youth with the necessary skills for successful emancipation. In addition, Howing (1990) states that children who exhibit interpersonal problem-solving skills are less likely to experience peer-relationship disturbances, thus being able to establish network units for social support purposes.

When discussing interpersonal relationships, Rice and McFadden (1988) found that when the adolescents' issues went unexpressed, maladaptive behavior resulted. However, when foster youth were given the opportunity to talk openly about their feelings regarding others, their interpersonal relationships improved. Adolescents benefit from learning interdependence as much as they do in learning dependence.

The life force that carries many adolescents into adulthood may be stunted or at least minimized by

maltreatment occurring early in life. Many physically abused youths have lived so long with chronic pain that they do not know what it is like to have a decent quality of life. Years of emotional neglect may have left them depleted and exhausted, unable to recuperate from even the minor woes of pre-adolescent life and impending adulthood. The effects of maltreatment during development can consequently hamper a youth's ability to master the skills needed for interdependence and will hence influence foster youths' individual experiences. Equally important in ameliorating the effects of maltreatment is the availability of support and nurturance from other adults (Maluccio, Krieger, & Pine, 1990). In essence, when foster youth are planning for emancipation, the focus of therapeutic intervention should be supportive.

Deficits in the System

At this time, the literature shows that transitional services are available for the foster youth population. These services are offered to children aging out of the foster care system. Transitional services particularly focus on areas of housing, education, employment and health (Little Hoover Commission, 1999). Currently, these services are provided to foster youth age sixteen to

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eighteen. Some counties offer aftercare services to emancipated foster youth up to the age of twenty-one.

The cultural background of each youth is important in helping them make their way into adulthood. Interdependent-living preparation does not include respect for and attention to the special needs of various ethnicities; this will leave a substantial portion of emancipated youth unequipped to handle their transition (Maluccio et al., 1990). Recognizing that various ethnicities form networks differently will be a helpful factor in understanding the best ways to implement intervention strategies with each particular youth. Being culturally sensitive will also prove to be helpful when encountering particular youth whose ethnic origin does not recognize social networking as positive.

When the time to exit the foster care system arrives, foster youth are discharged with the expectation of assuming responsibility for their lives. Achieving economic and socio-personal self-sufficiency entails working, finding a place to live, being able to budget and manage money, paying bills, preparing meals, and being able to function on one's own (Mech, 1988). Much of foster youths' success depends on the degree to which child

welfare commits itself to preparing them for self-sufficiency.

Some ideas proposed by the government are to extend the age for foster youth support from eighteen to twenty-one. Recent legislation, HR 1802 and HR 3443, have been set in motion to expand transitional services to prepare foster youth to live independently. Emancipated youth will have health care, be able to maintain a larger amount of money in their checking accounts (ranging from $1,000 to $10,000) and have access to room and board. With this legislation, independent living program funds will also double (Allred, 1999; Marks, 2000).

The Need for Social Support Research

Further research pertaining directly to social support among emancipated foster youth must be conducted. Social support is essential in the transitional aspect of their lives (Bauman, 2000). Children have been placed in multiple placements throughout their foster care experience and a large number often stay in the system until they come of age. PL 96-272 is a bill set out to restructure out of home care for foster youth. It is geared towards preventing unnecessary removal of children from their placements. The bill also aims to promote more

stable and permanent placements (Mallon, 1998).

Continuingly changing foster youths' placements often

leaves them unable to cultivate solid relationships

(Little Hoover Commission, 1999).

In respecting the importance of social support, many

Independent Living Programs have added a mentoring

component (Riverside County Office of Education, 1999).

Some other modes of social support are elicited in

providing foster youth with opportunities such as a

college education. In Massachusetts, monies specifically

for foster youth exist (1.2 million currently) to fund

their college education (Massachusetts announces grants

for foster children, 2001). Five percent of foster youth

currently are obtaining college degrees.

Although efforts are made to assist emancipated youth

in a successful transition, many agencies know problems

are still present. Statistical data shows that foster

youth still fall short of effective social support or

transitional services (Little Hoover Commission, 1999).

They are forced to leave the system whether or not they

have attained skills to maintain an apartment, seek a job

or balance a checkbook (Allred, 1999; Massinga, 1999). If

changes are not made, foster youth will continue to slip

through the cracks.

Summary

The literature is important to the project presented in Chapter Two. Theories guiding conceptualization regarding adolescents and their development in the social environment are relevant issues to discuss. In addition, deficits in the social service system and the need for social support research are also important in investigating the preparedness of foster youth for emancipation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter, a discussion of the methodology will be provided. Included will be the type of study design and method of sampling. Additionally, the data collection method as well as the type of instrument utilized will be addressed. Last, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis will be mentioned.

Study Design

The specific purpose of the study was to explore emancipated foster youths' networks of social support. The study evaluated whether or not emancipated foster youth with networks of social support were better prepared for adulthood. This study examines the possible correlations between emancipated foster youths' social support networks and their preparedness for adulthood.

·The study employed a quantitative method. As researcher, it was important to recognize the need for participants to respond independently and separately from the researchers until data was collected. Furthermore, a quantitative approach was most effective in reaching a

specific and precise understanding of one aspect of an already defined social problem.

The research design best suited for this particular study was survey research. This allowed an acquisition of a greater sample size. With both members of the research team present, questionnaires were distributed to a group of participants who were asked to complete them individually. An informed consent explaining the project and obtaining the participants' consent was attached to the questionnaire (Appendix B).

Limitations of the study included not being able to access the total number of prospective participants within participating agencies. A diligent effort was made to access a true representation of emancipated foster youth. The goal of the research was to examine the relationship between the variables of social support and preparedness for adulthood among emancipated foster youth.

Sampling

The sample size (N = 69) of emancipated foster youth was recruited from Riverside County Department of Pubic Social Services, Independent Living Skills Program and Cameron Hill Associates, an agency serving emancipated foster youth of San Bernardino County Department of

Children's Services. The age of the respondents ranged from eighteen to twenty-one years of age. A non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized.

In order to determine if obtaining the sample was feasible, the researchers spoke to agency administrators that had access to the sample population. Question such as whether or not the researchers would be able to have access to the population as well as the number of participants accessible for the study were asked. In attempting to obtain the sample, all inter-agency human subjects review processes were implemented. Agency administrators were able to view the researchers' proposal as well as the informed consent, questionnaire and debriefing statement.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected from (N = 69) emancipated foster youth. A reflection of foster youths' experiences, access or lack of access to social support and a measure of preparedness were all relevant information to know. Knowledge of factors such as whether or not emancipated foster youth have a network of social support along with of whom or what it consists of was addressed in the questionnaire. This was critical in examining whether

having social support contributes to overall preparedness for adulthood.

The independent variable was the emancipated foster youth's social support. Social Support was measured by using the social support questionnaire (SSQ). The SSQ measures the number, availability and frequency of contact with social support networks. The eight-item instrument measuring these variables was created from an existing Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) and utilizes an ordinal Likert-type scale (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983).

The dependent variable was preparedness for adulthood among emancipated foster youth. Measuring whether or not the youth can live and function independently was achieved by observing a number of factors asked in nineteen-items of the instrument. The factors included basic self care, social skills, shopping, budgeting, money management, knowledge and use of safe sex practices, job hunting and attainment, self esteem, goal setting, the ability to forge friendships, resource gathering and adaptation to various situations. The researchers created this portion of the questionnaire by utilizing an existing Transitional Independent Living Plan, administered to youth entering Independent Living Programs. Responses were measured

ordinally with a four-point Likert-type scale. Other
questions asked of the participants addressed their
current living situation, the length of time they have
been there, whether or not they have graduated from high
school, and if they are pursuing some higher level of
education. Nominal demographic information such as gender,
age and ethnicity are collected in nine items of the
instrument.

Procedures

Before data collection, a pretest of the instrument
was conducted with one member of the emancipated foster
youth population. The study assisted the researchers in
altering the original instrument to adequately obtain
effective responses of prospective participants.
Procedures for data collection began with researchers
meeting the participants at agency sites. Both sites were
familiar to the participants.

Prior to disseminating questionnaires, brief
instructions were given on how to complete the surveys as
well as the approximate time the survey would take to
complete. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were
addressed. Due to the sensitivity of the questions,
numbers were provided on the debriefing statement for

participants to access counseling services if needed. Upon completing the survey, participants were provided with a gift certificate as an incentive for their participation.

In addition to disseminating surveys to participants in person, sixty-eight additional surveys were mailed out to participants who were unable to be physically present to participate. The mailing included instructions for completing the survey, an addressed stamped envelope and an incentive coupon, redeemable upon completion and return of the survey. Follow up phone calls were made to insure the maximum return of surveys.

Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality of all participants was protected. No names or identifying information was placed on questionnaires. An informed consent and a debriefing statement were provided. The debriefing statement included the names of the researchers and advisor along with a phone number to contact researchers if participants had additional questions. In case any respondents chose to withdraw from the research, numbers were placed on the informed consent and corresponding debriefing statement for tracking. Telephone numbers and agency names were

provided for participants to access counseling services if needed.

Data Analysis

The quantitative procedures utilized to answer the research question included correlational measures. Data analysis was conducted with descriptive and analytic objectives. Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and dispersion were used to describe the characteristics of all variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilized as the bivariate statistical measure to assess the relationships between preparedness and social support.

Summary

This chapter described the methods utilized in the acquisition of data pertaining to the sample of emancipated foster youth. Procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis are mentioned. This study seeks to determine access to social support is beneficial in preparing foster youth for the challenges of adulthood.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter four presents an overview of the results. A discussion and a table illustrating demographic characteristics of the respondents are provided. Next, Bivariate measures of social support and preparedness is conducted. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with a summary.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the respondents (see Table 1). The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 21 years with a mean of 18.99. Within the sample 69.6% were females and 30.4% were males. Thirty-one percent of the respondents were Caucasian, 29% were Multi-Ethnic, 21.7% were African-American, 15.9% were Latino/Hispanic, and 1.4% were Native American.

Most respondents (70.8%) received high school diplomas, 21.5% received G.E.D's and 7.7% completed vocational training. Half of the respondents are currently attending a 2-year/Junior college, 5.9% are attending a 4-year university and 8.8% are attending a Vocational/Technical school. About a third of the respondents (30.4%) work part-time, 27.5% work full-time,

15.9% are unemployed, 17.4% are currently seeking employment, 2.9% have no work experience and the remaining respondents (5.8%) indicated other.

About a third of the respondents (34.8%) have a checking account, 27.3% have both a savings and checking account, 19.7% have a savings account, and 18.2% indicated other. Nearly half of the respondents (43.5) live on their own, 7.2% live with birth parents, 2.9% live with adoptive parents, 5.8% live with foster parents, 4.3% live with relatives, 8.7% live with friends, 15.9% use assisted living and 11.6% indicated other.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Mean	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender (N = 69)			
Female		48	69.6%
Male		21	30.4%
Age (N = 69)	18.99		
18		30	43.5%
19		19	27.5%
20		11	15.9%
21		9	13.0%
Ethnicity (N = 69)			
African-American		15	21.7%
Caucasian		22	31.9%
Latino/Hispanic		11	15.9%
Native American		1	1.4%
Asian-American		0	0%
Multi-Ethnic		20	29.0%

Variable	Mean	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Highest Level of Education Completed (N = 65)			
High School Diploma		46	70.8%
G.E.D.		14	21.5%
Vocational Training		5	7.7%
Associate Degree		0	0%
Current Education (N = 68)			
2 Year/Junior College		34	50.0%
4 Year University		4	5.9%
Vocational/Technical		6	8.8%
School		24	35.3%
None			
Employment Status (N = 69)			
Full-Time		19	27.5%
Part-Time		21	30.4%
Unemployment		11	15.9%
Currently seeking		12	17.4%
employment		4	5.8%
Other			
Accounts (N = 66)			
Savings		13	19.7%
Checking		23	34.8%
Saving and Checking		18	27.3%
Other		12	18.2%
Current Living Situation (N = 68)			
Birth Parent(s)		5	7.2%
Adoptive Parent(s)		2	2.9%
Foster Parents(s)		4	5.8%
Relative(s)		3	4.3%
Friend(s)		6	8.7%
On my own		30	43.5%
Assisted living (Transitional living placement)		11	15.9%
Other		8	11.6%

Table 2 presents responses of preparedness among emancipated foster youth (see Table 2). When asked about their ability to dress, groom and utilize hygiene, almost

all respondents (98.6%) "strongly agreed" to their competence in these areas. When asked if they were able to shop for necessities the great majority of respondents (92.8%) strongly agreed they were able to. Budgeting money was a task respondents agreed (47.8%) and strongly agreed (44.9%) to have the ability to do.

A majority of the respondents (85.5%) strongly agreed they had table manners. More than three-quarter (82.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed to have the ability to hold a conversation. More than half of the respondents (52.2%) strongly agreed to be able to manage time. Almost all (91.3%) respondents have knowledge of safe sex practices. In regards to the question if respondents take responsibility for actions, 1.4% strongly disagreed, 2.9% disagreed, 11.6% agreed and 84.1% strongly agreed.

The majority of the respondents (85.5%) have the ability to search for a job and fill out an application. In regards to the question about self-esteem, most respondents agreed (43.5%) and strongly agreed (44.9%) to having high self-esteem. Slightly more than half of the respondents (58%) are able to adjust to different situations as well as access resources. Almost two-thirds of the respondents have the ability to make friends. More

the half (63.8%) of the respondents had the ability to apartment hunt.

When asked if they had short-term goals, 55.1% strongly agreed, 37.7% agreed, 5.8% disagreed and 1.4% strongly disagreed. More than two-thirds of the respondents (76.8%) reported to have long-term goals. Almost two-thirds of the respondents do not own a vehicle. Almost all respondents (97.1%) have the ability to utilize transportation.

Table 2. Preparedness

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Dress and groom (N = 69)		
Agree	1	1.4%
Strongly Agree	68	98.6%
Utilize hygiene (N = 69)		
Agree	1	1.4%
Strongly Agree	68	98.6%
Shop for necessities (N = 69)		
Agree	5	7.2%
Strongly Agree	64	92.8%
Budget money (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	4	5.8%
Agree	33	47.8%
Strongly Agree	31	44.9%
Table Manners (N = 69)		
Agree	10	14.5%
Strongly Agree	59	85.5%
Hold a conversation (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Agree	11	15.9%
Strongly Agree	57	82.6%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Time Management (N = 69)		
Disagree	8	11.6%
Agree	25	36.2%
Strongly Agree	36	52.2%
Safe Sex (N = 69)		
Disagree	2	2.9%
Agree	4	5.8%
Strongly Agree	63	91.3%
Responsible (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	2	2.9%
Agree	8	11.6%
Strongly Agree	58	84.1%
Job/Application (N = 69)		
Disagree	4	5.8%
Agree	6	8.7%
Strongly Agree	59	85.5%
Self Esteem (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	7	10.1%
Agree	30	43.5%
Strongly Agree	31	44.9%
Flexibility (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	3	4.3%
Agree	25	36.2%
Strongly Agree	40	58.0%
Access to resources (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	4	5.8%
Agree	24	34.8%
Strongly Agree	40	58.0%
Make friends (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	2	2.9%
Disagree	4	5.8%
Agree	21	30.4%
Strongly Agree	42	60.9%
Apt. Hunt (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	2	2.9%
Disagree	2	2.9%
Strongly Agree	21	30.4%
Agree	44	63.8%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Short-term goals (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	4	5.8%
Agree	26	37.7%
Strongly Agree	38	55.1%
Long-term goals (N = 69)		
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4%
Disagree	1	1.4%
Agree	14	20.3%
Strongly Agree	53	76.8%
Own vehicle (N = 69)		
Yes	25	36.2%
No	44	63.8%
Transportation (N = 69)		
Yes	67	97.1%
No	2	2.9%

Table 3 presents responses to questions measuring frequency of social support (see Table 3). When asked about individuals living in Southern California that were available to them, 51.7% reported as having one parent, 39.5% reported that they had no adoptive parents living in Southern California, 54.3% reported as having one foster parent, 36.8% reported having one relative and 41.3% reported having, at least, one friend living in Southern California.

When asked about the frequency of communicating with these individuals, answers varied. More than one-third (39.3%) of the respondents did not communicate with their parents once per week, 21.4% communicate once per week,

12.5% twice per week, 10.7% once per month, 10.7% once per year, and 1.8% twice per year. Almost one-third (29.3%) of the respondents do not speak with their adoptive or foster parents often. About one-fourth (23.6%) of respondents communicate with relatives once per week, 20% twice per month, 20% not often, 14.5% once per month, 9.1% once per month, and 5.5% twice per month.

Nearly half (45%) of the respondents communicate with their friends once per week, 38.3% twice per week, and 5% not often, 5% once per month. More than half of the respondents report having 0-5 confidants. The remaining fifteen percent report having 6-20 confidants.

Table 3. Frequency of Social Support

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Parents living in (N = 58) Southern California		
0	9	15.5%
1	30	51.7%
2	13	22.4%
3	2	3.4%
4	1	1.7%
5	1	1.7%
6	2	3.4%
Adoptive parents living (N = 38) In Southern California		
0	15	39.5%
1	11	28.9%
2	8	21.1%
6	2	5.3%
7	1	2.6%
9	1	2.6%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Foster parents living in (N = 46) Southern California		
0	8	17.4%
1	25	54.3%
2	7	15.2%
3	2	4.3%
6	2	4.3%
13	1	2.2%
20	1	2.2%
Relatives living in (N = 57) Southern California		
0-5	40	70.2%
6-10	14	24.5%
15-17	3	5.4%
Friends living in Southern (N = 63) California		
1-5	35	55.6%
6-10	23	36.5%
11-15	3	4.8%
16-28	2	3.2%
Communicate with parents (N = 56)		
Once per week	12	21.4%
Twice per week	7	12.5%
Once per month	6	10.7%
Twice per month	1	1.8%
Once per year	6	10.7%
Not often	22	39.3%
Not applicable	2	3.6%
Communicate with adoptive (N = 40) Parents		
Once per week	3	7.3%
Twice per week	5	12.2%
Once per month	2	4.9%
Twice per month	2	4.9%
Once per year	1	2.4%
Not often	12	29.3%
Not applicable	15	36.6%

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Communication with foster (N = 48) Parents		
Once per week	7	14.6%
Twice per week	8	16.7%
Once per month	3	6.3%
Twice per month	1	2.1%
Once per year	5	10.4%
Not often	14	29.2%
Not applicable	10	20.8%
Communication with relatives (N = 55)		
Once per week	13	23.6%
Twice per week	11	20.0%
Once per month	8	14.5%
Twice per month	3	5.5%
Once per month	5	9.1%
Not often	11	20.0%
Not applicable	4	7.3%
Communication with friends (N = 60)		
Once per week	27	45.0%
Twice per week	23	38.3%
Once per month	3	5.0%
Not often	3	5.0%
Not applicable	4	6.7%
Confidants (N = 67)		
0-5	57	85.1%
6-20	10	14.9%

Table 4 presents responses to questions measuring availability of social support (see Table 4). When asked if they had people available to listen to them, almost half (49.3%) of the respondents stated "almost always," 27.5% reported "most of the time," 18.8% reported "some of the time" and 4.3% reported "not at all." Approximately half (47.8%) of the respondents indicate that "almost always" they had someone available to console them when

needed, 27.5% reported "most of the time," 17.4% reported "some of the time" and 7.2% reported "not at all."

Table 4. Availability of Social Support

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
People to listen to you (N = 69)		
Almost always	34	49.3%
Most of the time	19	27.5%
Some of the time	13	18.8%
Not at all	3	4.3%
People to console you (N = 69)		
Almost always	33	47.8%
Most of the time	19	27.5%
Some of the time	12	17.4%
Not at all	5	7.2%
People who care for (N = 68) you when sick		
Almost always	26	38.2%
Most of the time	16	23.5%
Some of the time	15	22.1%
Not at all	11	16.2%
People to help (N = 68) with finances		
Almost always	16	23.5%
Most of the time	8	11.8%
Some of the time	19	27.9%
Not at all	25	36.8%
People who appreciate you (N = 68)		
Almost always	35	51.5%
Most of the time	14	20.6%
Some of the time	13	19.1%
Not at all	6	8.8%

More than one-third (38.2%) of the respondents had someone to care for them when sick. Thirty six percent of the respondents do not have someone available to assist them with their finances, 27.9% reported to have someone

available some of the time, 23.5% reported "almost always" and 11.8% reported "most of the time." More than half (51.5%) of the respondents almost always have people who appreciate them in their lives.

In examining the results of Pearson's correlation coefficient tests, the correlation between availability of various types of social support and preparedness was highly correlated and the findings were statistically significant at ($r = -.62$, $p < .05$). However, the correlation between frequency of contact and preparedness was not significant (see Table 5). The more the respondents perceived that they had social support; their responses indicated being more prepared for adulthood.

Table 5. Zero Order Correlations Between Preparedness and Social Support

	Frequency of Contact	Availability of Contact
Preparedness	.085	−.621*

*P< .05

Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results extracted from the project. Demographic characteristics and bivariate statistics were presented. The question examined in the

study, "Does access to social support better prepare emancipated foster youth for adulthood" was supported by statistically significant results.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a brief discussion of the key finding as a result of the data collected in this research project. Recommendations for social work practice, policy and research concerning this topic, highlights the need for diligent efforts to continue to focus on research pertaining to social support and its effect on emancipated foster youths' preparedness for adulthood. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with a summary.

Discussion

The goal of the study was to examine whether or not social support was related to preparedness for adulthood among emancipated foster youth. In order to test the hypothesis, researchers distributed questionnaires to groups of emancipated foster youth in Independent Livings Skill Aftercare Programs. The participants in the study were representative of individuals utilizing aftercare services.

The participants were primarily Caucasian females eighteen years of age. Most respondents report as having obtained a high school diploma, and are currently

attending a two-year college. One third of the participants are currently working part-time. Approximately half of the participants live independently, and about 80% have, at least, a checking account. All together, these variables are indications of the ability of the respondents' ability to function independently.

In examining what variables affect the emancipated foster youths' preparedness for adulthood, the findings indicated that those who were best prepared for adulthood were able to budget money, look for a job or an apartment, make friends, utilize transportation and access resources. Most participants rated high (strongly agree, agree) on the preparedness scale. The majority of participants do not own their vehicle. However, they have some knowledge on how to utilize public transportation. Most participants typically have one parent, one foster parent, one relative, or at least one friend living in southern California. A majority of participants do not communicate with their parents or foster parents often, but communicate with relatives and friends more frequently. Close to half of the participants almost always have someone available to listen, console, and care for them when they are sick, help them with finances and appreciate them.

Respondent's preparedness was significantly related to their perceived availability of various types of social support. It appears that social support contributes to the resilience of foster youth. This finding is consistent with previous research (Procidano & Heller, 1983). However, a correlation between frequency of social support and preparedness proved not to be of great significance. In other words, it is not the frequency of contact that participants had with friends or family, nor the actual number of friends or family that the participants had, which prepared them best for adulthood. Rather, it is the perceived social support in the lives of the participants, which appears to make the greatest difference as to whether they are prepared for adulthood or not.

The results of the study support the literature, which claims the perceived availability of social support, whether from friends or relatives maintains greater significance than the number of individuals in one's life (Procidano & Heller, 1983). One unanticipated result was that the frequency of contact with social support networks was not significant when correlated with preparedness. This indicates that the amount of social support networks as well as the frequency in which participants have contact with them does not indicate significant social

support. Emotional ties appear to be more significant than physical availability.

Contrary to Ryan (1988) who states adolescents leaving the foster care system lack the necessary skills required to meet their day-to-day needs, the participants in this study reported self-efficacy in social skill attainment. Participants' responses appear to reflect defined self-proficiency in preparedness for adulthood. They commonly chose agree and strongly agree on the preparedness scale. According to this research, those who perceived a greater sense of social support also reported being able to attain the social skills necessary to prepare them for adulthood.

Limitations

Several limitations existed in the study. Both internal and external impeding factors existed in obtaining the sample. One internal factor was the lack of motivation and desire among participants asked to complete the survey. The lack of knowledge of the benefits of the study made participants apprehensive about taking the survey. External impeding factors were the inability to get to the testing site due to a lack of transportation, conflicting work schedule, notification difficulties,

missing database information, or other circumstances. Next, due to difficulty in obtaining a sample of foster youth and some influence of impeding factors, a non-representative sample existed. As a result of this, the foster youth used in this research, as well as the size of the sample, hinder the ability to generalize the findings to a greater population of foster youth.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

In the field of social work, the concept of support networks have long been recognized as an important entity in individual lives; however less is known about the role social support plays in the life of emancipated foster youth. This study provides further information that supports the importance of social support among the emancipated foster youth population. Knowledge of the importance of the perceived availability of social support among emancipated foster youth in their preparedness for adulthood can be helpful in many facets of social work. Nurturing relationships under safe and non-hazardous circumstances with foster parents, adoptive parents, guardians or biological family members can prove to be a useful element assisting foster youth's preparedness for adulthood. In addition to preparing foster youth for

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adulthood, nurturing relationships also prepare them for developmental transitions.

In implementing services for this population, taking these findings into consideration can drastically affect the path social workers take in their decision-making process. For example, in the concurrent planning processes and in establishing the best plan for foster youth, a social worker may strongly consider how significant the relationship between the young adult and their care-provider or other social support networks is to his/her well-being. Another consideration for social support practice is in development of independent living skills programs. Currently, caregivers are not considered as being instrumental in the independent living skills program process. However, the findings of the study reveal that these individuals are exceedingly important to the process.

Social workers need to focus on relationship skill building when considering what counseling services they are going to offer these youth as pat of their Case Plan goals. For example, social workers can choose counseling service options focusing on the building of skills necessary to foster and develop relationships with past, current, or future networks of support. Instruction on

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dealing with past and present relationship issues may assist the youth in learning how to negotiate their needs and work through the trauma and crisis as a result of previous broken bonds. Although a youth's psychopathology and trauma is of great importance, dealing with relational issues will prove to be helpful if the youth should have to return to the very home from which they were originally detained from. From this study it is evident that forging secure relationships as well as negotiating needs within a relationship are effective skills that emancipated foster youth can carry beyond emancipation. A good social support system may allow for a reasonable chance of stability in the youth's life and may provide greater opportunity for success and preparedness.

Being knowledgeable about the importance of social support can help bring about changes in policies and practice among social workers. Further research can expand the knowledge necessary in the creation of programs that focusing on correcting dysfunctional familial relationships. Rather than assuming that biological bonds are permanently severed upon detention of the minor, further research may focus on how many foster youth chose to maintain contact with the very families that they were originally removed from.

Conclusion

A brief discussion of the key findings as displayed in this research indicates that social support is an important aspect in the lives of emancipated foster youth. It proves to be instrumental in their preparedness for adulthood. Acquiring and maintaining knowledge of the skills necessary to achieve supportive relationships will improve service delivery targeted towards foster youth. Through the implementation of policy and programs, emphasizing supportive relationships, changes altering the current method of intervention can improve the current protocol of service brokerage.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part 1: Demographics

Please circle or write in the appropriate response.

1. Gender:
    (1) Female
    (2) Male

2. Age: _____

3. Ethnicity:
    (1) African-American
    (2) Caucasian
    (3) Latino/Hispanic
    (4) Native-American
    (5) Asian-American
    (6) Multi-Ethnic (please specify) _____

4. Highest level of education completed?
    (1) High School Diploma
    (2) G.E.D
    (3) Vocational Training
    (4) Associate Degree

5. I am currently attending:
    (1) 2 Year/Junior college
    (2) 4 Year University
    (3) Vocational/Technical School
    (4) None

6. Employment status:
    (1) I am currently working full-time. If so, for how long?
         _____ years _____ months
    (2) I am currently working part-time. If so, for how long?
         _____ years _____ months
    (3) I am unemployed.
    (4) I am currently seeking employment.
    (5) I have no work experience.
    (6) Other (please specify) _____

7.	Do you have:
	(1)	A savings account
	(2)	A checking account
	(3)	Both a saving and checking account
	(4)	Other

8.	Circle the answer the best describes your current living situation. I currently live:
	(1)	With my birth parent(s)
	(2)	With my adoptive parent(s)
	(3)	With my foster parent(s)
	(4)	With relatives
	(5)	With a friend
	(6)	On my own
	(7)	Other (please specify) _____

9.	How long have you been living in this situation?
	_____ years _____ months

Part 2: PREPAREDNESS

For the following questions, rate yourself according to the scale below.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I am able to dress and groom myself.	1	2	3	4
2.	I have the ability to use proper hygiene.	1	2	3	4
3.	I have the ability to shop for clothing, hygiene items and all other necessities.	1	2	3	4
4.	I am able to budget my money.	1	2	3	4
5.	I am able to use proper table manners.	1	2	3	4
6.	I have the ability to hold a conversation with various different people.	1	2	3	4
7.	I am able to manage my time.	1	2	3	4
8.	I am aware of safe sex practices.	1	2	3	4
9.	I take responsibility for my actions.	1	2	3	4
10.	I have the ability to look for a job and fill out a job application.	1	2	3	4
11.	I have high self-esteem.	1	2	3	4
12.	I can adjust to different situations.	1	2	3	4
13.	If I need information about things in the community, I know how to find it.	1	2	3	4
14.	I am able to make friends.	1	2	3	4
15.	I know how to look for an apartment.	1	2	3	4
16.	I have short-term goals.	1	2	3	4
17.	I have long-term goals.	1	2	3	4

18a. Do you have your own vehicle?
_____ Yes _____ No

18b. I know how to use public transportation.
_____ Yes _____ No

PART 3: SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SOCIAL NETWORK

1a.   How often do you communicate with the individuals listed below?

1b.   Please tell me how many of the individuals listed below live in Southern California?

    1-more than once a week
2-once a week
3-bi-weekly
4-once a month
5-once a year
6-not applicable

	1a	1b
Parent (s)	_____	_____
Adoptive parent (s)	_____	_____
Foster parents (s)	_____	_____
Relatives (s)	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____

2.   How many confidants do you have to talk about private matters with in Southern California? _____

Please rate the availability of the people in your life based on the scale below.

	almost always	most of the time	some of the time	not at all
3. How often do you have people you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk?	1	2	3	4
4. How often do you have people you can count on to console you when you are very upset?	1	2	3	4
5. How often do you have people you can count on to provide care when you are sick?	1	2	3	4
6. How often do you have people you can count on to help you financially	1	2	3	4
7. How often do you have people who appreciate you as a person?	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate in is designed to investigate emancipated foster youth and their social support networks. This study is being conducted by Nicole Anita Hart and Maria Johnson, MSW students under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino. The university requires that you give your consent before participating in this study.

In this study, you will be asked to respond to statements on a questionnaire about your relationships with family and friends. There are no right or wrong answers. Completion of this questionnaire should take approximately 15 minutes. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. No names will be used in the questionnaire or in any part of this research study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. In order to ensure the validity of this study, the researchers ask that you do not discuss this study with other participants.

If you are interested in the results of this study, copies will be available in the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino after June 2002. If you have any questions about the research at any time, you may contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 880-5184.

Please check the box below to indicate that you have read this informed consent, freely consent to participate in this study and are at least 18 years of age.

Please place a check mark here ☐   **Date:** _____

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

You have just participated in a study to assess the barriers confronting emancipated foster youth, their social support networks and their preparedness for adulthood. The study is being conducted by Nicole Anita Hart and Maria Johnson under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor of Social Work, California State University San Bernardino.

Information supplied by you is crucial in providing insight into issues that may affect service delivery for emancipated foster youth. The results of this study will benefit emancipated foster youth and social service workers who are seeking to understand issues that contribute to service delivery for this population.

Your participation has been voluntary. Please do not reveal the nature of the study to potential participants as it could jeopardize the validity of the research.

To obtain a copy of the results of this study, you may contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 880-5184 after June 2002.

If you should experience any discomfort in relation to this study, please call 1-800-706-7500 (Riverside County) or 1-888-743-1478 (San Bernardino County) for assistance in finding counseling services.
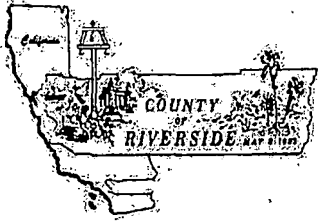
Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX D

LETTERS

Department of Public Social Services

REFER REPLY TO:

○ Administrative Office
4060 County Circle Drive
Riverside, CA. 92503

○ Eligibility Administrative Svcs.
3950 Reynolds Road
Riverside, CA. 92503

○ Staff Development Training Ctr.
22690 Cactus Ave. Ste. 100
Moreno Valley, CA. 92553

○ DPSS Medi-Cal Unit
Riverside County
Regional Medical Center
26520 Cactus Avenue
Moreno Valley, CA. 92555

○ 1605 Spruce Street
Riverside, CA. 92507

○ 1020 Iowa Avenue
Riverside, CA. 92507

○ 3021 Franklin Avenue
Riverside, CA. 92507

○ Adoption Services
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA. 92503

○ Arlington Office
10281 Kidd Street
Riverside, CA. 92503

○ 4260 Tequesquite Avenue
Riverside, CA. 92501

○ 23119 Cottonwood Ave.
Building C, 2nd Floor
Moreno Valley, CA. 92553

○ 1151 North A Street
Perris, CA. 92571

○ 2055 N. Perris Blvd. Ste. B
Perris, CA. 92571

○ 575 Chaney Street
Elsinore, CA. 92530

○ 1075 N. State Street
Hemet, CA. 92543

○ 43264 Business Park Drive
Building B Suite B-1
Temecula, CA. 92590

○ 505 S. Buena Vista
Corona, CA. 91720

○ 3178 Hamner Avenue
Norco, CA. 91760

○ 47950 Arabia Street
Indio, CA. 92201

○ 68615 Perez Rd. Unit 9 A
Cathedral City, CA. 92234

○ 71-777 San Jacinto Drive
Rancho Mirage, CA. 92234

○ 161 West Ramsey
Banning, Ca. 92220

○ 1225 West Hobson Way
Blythe, CA. 92225

Dennis J. Boyle, Director

Cal State University San Bernardino
Department of Social Work
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, Ca. 92407-2397

Dear Sirs:

This Letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that _Maria Johnson/Nicole Hart_ has obtained consent from Riverside Department of Pubic Social Services, to conduct the research project entitled " _Emancipated Foster Youth's Social Support and Preparedness for Adulthood_ ".

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact:

James P. Meelu MSW / SSS II at _909 - 358-3466_
    Name/Title   Phone Number

Sincerely,

[signature] _____   _12-27-01_
    Signature   Date

David Dennis _____   _Deputy Director_
    Name (printed)   Title/Position at DPSS

January 2, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Cameron Hill Associates, I am writing in regards to a survey that will be conducted by Maria Johnson, Nicole Hart, Robin McCall and Kristin Anthony-Mahler. I have reviewed the information that was sent to me. I am giving my consent for their questionnaire to be distributed amongst the youth that we work with.

If any questions arise, feel free to contact me during normal business hours at (909) 890-4301.

Thank you.

Raymond Howard
Director/Administrator

RH/ja

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

    Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart, Maria
                          Johnson

    Data Entry and Analysis:

    Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart,
                          Maria Johnson

2. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

    a. Introduction and Literature

        Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart,
                        Maria Johnson

    b. Methods

        Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart,
                        Maria Johnson

    c. Results

        Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart,
                        Maria Johnson

    d. Discussion

        Team Effort: Nicole Anita Hart,
                        Maria Johnson