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CHARACTERISTICS OF INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AND NON-INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

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

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

by
Raymond Acevedo
June 2007
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ABSTRACT

Foster youth are at a disadvantage when they reach young adulthood and are expected to live independently. Independent Living Programs (ILPs) are designed to assist foster youth through this transition. Furthermore, ILPs have been proven to be effective when foster youth are active participants. However, the purpose of this study was to describe these characteristics that led and did not lead to Independent Living Program participation. A quantitative study of 60 foster youth who were referred to ILP was conducted. The sample consisted of 30 ILP participants and 30 non ILP participants. An extraction form was used to collect secondary data from the ILP and Case Management System (CMS) database and presents the results. There were two findings that were statistically significant, which were a high school diploma or vocational training being related to an increase in ILP participation. The strongest recommendations for social work practice, research, and policy is to focus on ways to increase ILP participation because only 207 out of 883 ILP participants actually attended more than one ILP workshop.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express thanks to the following people who assisted me with this project: Dr. Janet Chang for supervising and assisting me with the research process, Katharine Peake for editing some of my work, and Linda Burgess for her help in formatting.
DEDICATION

First of all, I want to thank my mother for the unconditional love she has given me all of my life, which has taught me how to love and care for others. I also want to thank my father who has taught me how to work hard. Without his discipline I don’t think I would have survived the MSW program. I also want to thank my beautiful children Melissa, Raymond, and Andrew who have given me the most important reason to succeed in life. I love you all.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

This study will address significant problems that have affected foster youth with preparation for independent living. Adolescents in general have difficulty with the transition to adulthood. However, this transition is more difficult for foster youth because often they do not have the benefits and stability a family of origin can provide. Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) suggested that youth who were raised by their parents often had better support systems which prepared them to enter adulthood more effectively than foster youth. They also claimed that foster youth who have aged out of the system often were plagued with inadequate health care coverage, interpersonal skills, social support systems, and education. These youth were also more likely to experience homelessness, early parenthood, a criminal conviction, prostitution, and mental and physical health problems. Furthermore, they are unlikely to continue a college education or maintain stable employment (Collins, 2001; Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006).
Collins (2001) claimed that foster youth often spent a large amount of time in the foster care system due to excessive abuse by their family members of origin, which in turn negated their family support system. Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) also reported that aging out foster youth often did not receive the necessary support that was expected from a parent throughout childhood and adolescence. Collins (2006) stated that children who were raised with their families received more support from their parents beyond the age of 18. Additionally, Mendes and Moslehuddin demonstrated that a recent U.S. study found that most parents did not expect their children to complete the transition to adulthood until the age of 26.

Georgiades (2005) indicated that young adults often had their parents to fall back on when they experienced a crisis such as early parenthood, unemployment, or loss of a significant partner who had assisted with financial stability. Georgiades concluded that former foster youth who experienced these events usually did not have the privilege to depend on their relatives for assistance. Furthermore, Georgiades indicated that emancipated foster youth reported that they were not prepared to live self sufficient lives in the first place while in foster care.
In addition, they became overwhelmed when they emancipated and were expected to begin life independently. Finally, Georgiades reported that emancipated youth had difficulty with progressing in life because of the struggles they experienced just trying to get their daily needs met.

Despite the facts that foster youth needed to participate in Independent Living Programs (ILPs), and ILPs had been proven to be effective in preparing foster youth for successful transitions to adulthood, there were still many youth who did not take advantage of ILPs. Therefore, it was important to find out the reasons why foster youth who could benefit from ILPs were not taking advantage of these services. The characteristics of ILP participants and non ILP participants were explored in this research project. The study expected to identify those characteristics that led to ILP participation so that ILP coordinators and social work professionals had research based data to influence their decision making process.

However, the main concern in this project was to find out what non ILP participants had in common, identify them, and better prepare them to participate in ILPs while they are in foster care.
In 2004, there were 517,000 foster youth in the nation, and of these youth, 23,121 emancipated from care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). In this same year, ILP services were offered to 41,811 youth, and 29,173 youth received these services in California. Out of these 29,173 participants, 11,197 of them were emancipated foster youth (Independent Living Program annual statistical report, 2006). Additionally in 2005, San Bernardino county had 2,125 foster youth who exited the foster care system; of those 1,106 were reunified with their families, 443 were adopted, 243 emancipated, and the rest fell in other categories (California County Data Book, 2005).

In the early 1980s, social workers and policy makers became concerned with the inadequate preparation of foster care youth who had become emancipated. Many of these youth were unable to establish a stable home, employment, or education. Consequently, they became a burden to society by becoming involved in the criminal justice system, or recipients of welfare funds. Recognizing the need for change, a federal Independent Living Program was created in 1986 to address these issues. The ILP was implemented in all 50 states and offered services that included
independent living skills, counseling, educational assistance, and vocational support. Throughout the states and counties, various versions of ILPs exist to help the youth transition to adulthood successfully. In 1990, ILPs were amended from providing services from age 18 to age 21. However, the changes in the ILPs were not enforced, and the decision to implement these changes was left up to the states. (Child Welfare League of America, 1999).

Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan, and Nesmith (2001) reported that the wellbeing of youth who aged out of the foster care system in the nation had long been of great interest to child welfare practitioners and policy makers. ILPs were designed to address the needs of youth who emancipated out of the foster care system because of the difficulties the population had in living independently. Therefore, ILP services prepared older adolescent foster youth for self sufficiency upon exit from care (Child Welfare League of America, 1999; Collins, 2001; Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, 2005). ILP services were also created for youth who were not likely to return to their families or be adopted, and would eventually have nowhere to go once they became emancipated (Collins, 2001).
Again in 1999, the ILPs were subject to new policies that required ILPs to provide additional services. The introduction of the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA) doubled funding for ILP services, extended medical coverage and services till the age of 21, and held states accountable for providing ILP outcomes (Child Welfare League of America, 1999; Georgiades, 2005; Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, 2005). These extended services indicated that social welfare professionals who influenced policy recognized that foster youth were poorly transitioning into adulthood at age 18, and were not ready to live independently.

Studying the problem was important at the beginning of this project because there were efforts to measure whether the increase in funding for ILPs were providing quality interventions. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2005) indicated that recent research efforts had been aimed at identifying factors that contributed to successful transitions out of foster care. One such factor that had received relatively little attention in the research literature was the potential beneficial role of federally mandated ILPs. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2005) reported that since the increase in ILP funding, and accountability
imposed on states, there has not been adequate research conducted on the effectiveness of these measures on ILPs. Therefore, the effectiveness of the amendment of the Foster Care Independent Act of 1999 was unknown. Research in this area was limited and there was insufficient data to report on the effectiveness of the new changes that have been made to ILPs.

Furthermore, there have been reports of ILPs lacking in effective service delivery or unsuccessfully engaging youth to participate in ILP services (Government Accountability Report, 2004). Therefore, at the point in time this research was conducted it was imperative, in order to identify foster youth who were not participating in ILPs, to gather data on youth's participation in ILPs. Collins (2001) also reported that policies and programs addressing transitions to adulthood amongst emancipated youth are not concrete. Collins (2001) suggested that now was the time to revisit emancipation because the increase in funding for ILPs should indicate an improvement in emancipation outcomes.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of foster youth who participated in ILPs against those foster youth who did not participate in ILPs. In exploring these characteristics, the researcher hoped to gather information that could be utilized to better prepare foster youth for ILPs. The ultimate goal in this project was to get a more comprehensive assessment of why youth do not take advantage of services that have been proven to be of great assistance in the transitioning to adulthood.

Sonja (2004) demonstrated that it was important for foster youth, who aged out of care, to remain in the child welfare system in order for them to maintain services. Rashid and Sonja provided data that confirmed emancipated youth who continued to receive services had better outcomes than those foster youth who left the child welfare system. They also indicated that foster youth who participated in ILPs transitioned to adulthood more effectively than those who did not. Therefore, it was important for foster youth to become involved in ILPs to better prepare themselves for adulthood.

The rational for conducting the study was due to the fact that emancipated foster youth who had not participated
in ILPs had not been researched sufficiently. Most studies that have researched ILPs have used samples of those youth who have utilized ILP services. Although the study's sample consisted of half ILP participants, it also included 30 foster youth who did not participate in the ILPs. The participant and non participant sample was drawn from the ILP database. Those foster youth who were offered ILP services but refused services are defined as the non-ILP participants. The names of these youth were documented in the ILP database.

This study identified foster youth who had enrolled in ILPs but did not participate in ILPs. Furthermore, the study was unique in its kind because it provided a different perspective on comprehending non-ILP participant characteristics. McMillen, and colleagues (2003) stated that the more researchers can understand the needs of this population, the better prepared they will be to approach decision makers to influence policy changes. The study also hoped to contribute to the understanding of foster care needs by focusing on those characteristics that lead or do not lead to ILP participation. Hopefully, researchers will gain interest in this research project and perhaps it
will be a contribution to better preparing foster youth for emancipation.

A report conducted by the Government Accountability Office found that many foster youth did not participate in ILPs, even after funding had doubled for ILPs (Government Accountability Office, 2004). The study examined common characteristics that lead to non-ILP participation. In examining these characteristics, this study provided information that could be used to better prepare foster youth for ILPs.

Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt (2005) reported the importance of focusing on protective factors and processes that contributed to resilience in order for the social work profession to understand the mechanisms that promoted successful adaptation to adversity. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, (2005) also provided research that suggested that many foster youth who lack access to ongoing familial resources and other sources of support are at risk for developmental disruption during the transition to young adulthood. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger’s research indicated that it was important for foster youth to enroll in ILPs that could serve as a protective factor and offer social support.
This study used a quantitative, secondary analysis, and an extraction form that was created by the researcher to specifically examine those variables that were related to ILP participation. The sample consisted of current and previous foster youth, who were between the ages of 16 and 21 years of age, and who had been referred to ILPs. Half of the sample consisted of thirty ILP participants and the other half of thirty non-ILP participants. The participants were drawn through a review of the ILP database at the San Bernardino Department of Children’s Services. The data base files were reviewed, and those foster youth who had enrolled in the ILP but did not receive ILP services were identified, compiled, and compared to those who did receive ILP services.
Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

This project provided valuable information to multiple areas in the social work profession. The study could help researchers, child welfare professionals, ILP coordinators, clients, and all other concerned individuals to better understand the current nature of those characteristics that are attributed to the likelihood of ILP participation.

The significance of this project was to explore and identify those characteristics that lead to ILP participation or non-ILP participation amongst the foster youth population. In examining those distinguishing variables the project hoped to provide valuable information to multiple areas in the social services profession. The project may contribute to the improvement of the ILP recruitment process by providing valuable data to ILP coordinators.

Currently many foster youth are not attending ILPs for multiple reasons, and identification of these specific reasons was also the purpose of this project. The fact is that ILP participation was linked to better transitions to adulthood; therefore, identification of those factors that
lead to non ILP participation was crucial. By identifying variables that lead to ILP participation social workers could redirect their efforts to those youth who do not posses these characteristics. The data that was gathered in this study may be valuable in assisting social workers in preparing foster youth for ILPs. Social workers may be able to focus more on those characteristics that foster youth must overcome, and in the process social workers may save time and energy instead of using other strategies. For example, by building a framework that was based on the foster youth's characteristics, social workers could better educate foster youth on their probability of attending and graduating from an ILP. Ultimately, foster youth could be informed on how they can overcome those characteristics that do not lead to ILP participation.

Additionally, identifying those characteristics that lead to non-ILP participation, ILP workers and social workers could possibly better develop recruitment methods that specifically target this foster youth group. When social workers and ILP workers are equipped with the characteristics of the non-ILP participation group, they can better identify their clients' needs more effectively and prepare them for ILPs. Furthermore, when social
workers are knowledgeable of those characteristics that do lead to ILP participation, they have many avenues to explore, which they can use to prioritize best intervention practices. Furthermore, identifying variables that lead to ILP participation can redirect social work efforts to those youth who do not possess these characteristics. Social workers would be able to put their energy into improving those characteristics foster youth are lacking in order to increase their chances in succeeding in an ILP.

Social workers can also benefit from identifying those characteristics that lead to ILP participation. Social workers can use this knowledge to influence potential foster youth who already possess those characteristics that lead to successful participation in ILPs. By using research based evidence to educate foster youth on their likelihood of succeeding in ILPs social workers will motivate their clients more effectively. Providing foster youth factual information on how their lives may turn out for the better can possibly motivate them to continue to take advantage of ILPs.

Up to this point, this paper has shown that there is available funding for ILPs. Furthermore, ILPs have the backing of federal funding for program development.
However, the recruitment of ILP participants still does not meet the federal government's expectations. Therefore, this is the ideal time to research the effectiveness of ILPs and make appropriate recommendations in order to improve ILP outcomes.

Pecora (2000) indicated that some of the primary goals for child welfare are to protect children from harm, and promote foster youth development to facilitate the transition to adulthood. Although research showed that participation in ILPs was beneficial, there were still many foster youth who were not involved with ILPs. This study gathered data that could be valuable in identifying foster youth's likelihood of participating in ILPs. This study also identified youth who were least likely to participate in ILPs and provided data that could be used to address their special circumstances. For example, if an increase in placements makes it more likely for the foster youth to not participate in ILPs, stricter assessments of best placements would be recommended. This would increase the likelihood of the foster youth's participation in ILPs. This study provided characteristics that could contribute to the child welfare mission of preparing foster youth for independent living. The ultimate goal was to find out what
the differences were in foster youth who participated in ILPs from those who did not participate in ILPs.

Finally, identifying these special characteristics may motivate social work scholars to conduct further research in this area. Such preliminary research may generate further interest and studies in improving ILPs through a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics of foster youth who benefit from ILP participation.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the pursuit of understanding aging out foster youth, this paper had provided two theoretical perspectives. Erickson’s psychosocial theory and learning theory, which guided this study’s explanations of why foster youth did not participate in ILPs aimed at providing the social work profession with better intervention methods, especially with outreach. In order to understand why former foster youth did not apply for ILPs there must be a well rounded perspective.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A theory that guided this study was Erickson’s psychosocial development. Erickson (1950, 1968) developed a psychosocial theory which consisted of eight stages of development. According to Erickson, it is ideal to navigate through these stages successfully. If one does not transcend from the proceeding stages well, progression to the next stage will be more complicated to achieve. Aging out foster youth are under the category of Erickson’s
fifth stage of Identity versus Role Confusion. This is a time where the primary task is to develop a sense of identity. However, many foster youth have struggled through the previous stages of development, and the unsuccessful accomplishment of those stages has resulted in compounded problems that make life more difficult for the foster youth when transitioning into adulthood.

Erickson’s theory of succeeding in previous stages is imperative in order to succeed in one’s current stage; however, many foster youth have not succeeded in Erickson’s earlier developmental stages. This means that foster youth are struggling with forming their identity because they have not yet formed concrete values on which to base their identity. When there is no identity formation, it appears unrealistic to pursue any relationships or training, such as ILP. What this means, according to Erickson, is that many foster youth who are aging out of care are not ready to plan for the future because they have not successfully achieved their previous stages. For example, Erickson’s second stage of Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt indicated that youth who are restricted from action or exploration often learn to restrict themselves from engaging in particular activities. Assuming aging out foster youth did
not achieve autonomy, it is likely that they will doubt themselves from engaging in ILP.

Another task that appeared to be daunting for former foster youth was their ability to build trusting relationships. Much of this population has been placed in multiple settings throughout their foster care experience. Therefore, it is possible that foster youth have learned to distrust the child welfare system. First, the children are removed from their family of origin and then placed in a setting that does not meet their needs. This foster youth's experience often leads to dissatisfaction with social workers. When the foster youth reach 16 years of age and are offered ILP, why should they trust a system that has failed them many times before?

The second theory used in this study was learning theory. According to Zastrow, and Ashman (2004), this theory is important to recognize why an individual behaves the way they do. Learning theory focuses on how the environment influences an individual's behavior. Many youth often learn independent living skills throughout their childhood from their parents; unfortunately, this is not the case for foster youth. Foster youth are not left with many options; therefore, it is imperative that they
attend ILPs so they can improve their lack of independent living skills. ILP participants position themselves in an environment where they will observe the skills that are needed to live independently, which makes it more likely that they will apply these skills in their own lives. For example, foster youth may recognize these skills more effectively when they visualize their peers using them and in the process these skills may become more acceptable to them.

Characteristics of Independent Living Program Participants and Non-Independent Living Program Participants and Outreach Methods

Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger (2004) conducted a comparison study of former foster youth from California, who were currently attending a university and had participated in an ILP (N=81) and had not (N=113). These researchers found that ILP participants were more likely to be African Americans or Latinos who were placed in non-relative placements. The participants were also more likely to have experienced multiple placements as well as learned a variety of skills. Those individuals who did not participate in ILPs were more likely to have been placed with a relative. These findings indicated that foster
youth need to be enrolled in various programs in order to increase the likelihood of them participating in ILPs. It is important to note that youth who are placed with their relatives are not likely to participate in ILPs.

Furthermore, the authors indicated that those who were placed with relatives most likely had stability, which was a reason why they felt they did not need ILP services. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger also stated that it was likely that those youth who participated in ILPs were referred because of their history of multiple placements. Caretakers and social workers believed that youth who were placed in multiple foster homes or group homes could benefit the most from ILPs; therefore, they were more likely to be referred than foster youth who were placed in only a few placements.

Some of the characteristics of ILP participants and non-ILP participants are reported by McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, and Thompson (2003), which indicated that foster youth who participated in ILPs are more likely to be less functioning than those who did not participate in ILPs. However, in this study those individuals with excessive learning disabilities and conduct disorders were screened out. Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, (2004) also
stated that participants of ILPs were more likely to be African/American and Latinos with characteristics of having been placed in multiple placements and with a non-relative.

Georgiades (2005) examined foster youth participation in ILPs. He found that foster youth are more likely to participate in ILPs when they have an increase in protective factors. Therefore, he indicated that the more negative factors that are present will make it more likely that foster youth will not participate in ILPs. Furthermore, Georgiades concluded that a non foster care youth is more likely to succeed than a foster youth who has participated in ILPs. However, the study found that ILP foster youth participants do better than those who do not participate.

In another study, Georgiades (2005) examined the perceptions of ILPs amongst former foster youth. The results showed that the majority of youth were unsatisfied with and/or uninformed about ILPs. The study also indicated that emancipated foster youth reported that they are not prepared to live a self-sufficient life and become overwhelmed when they emancipate and are expected to face life independently. If emancipated foster youth are expressing that they were never aware of ILPs this draws a
concern of current outreach practices. Other foster youth indicated that they were dissatisfied with ILP services, which suggests that it is likely that many youth begin ILP services; however, when they become dissatisfied with the services they are at risk of withdrawing from the ILP. ILP coordinators should be recognized for the achieved task of participant enrollment. However, this data also indicated that ILPs must be improved in order to keep the participants continuously enrolled in ILPs.

Data from Florida’s Department of Children and Family services indicated that in order to be eligible for ILPs, youth must be at least 16 years old, full time students with GPAs greater than a 2.0, must work, and must have been referred to an ILP. (Florida DCF, 2002). It was understandable that foster youth must function adequately to participate in ILPs; however, these requirements were excessively high for most foster youth. Foster youth have been through many life changing crises for their age, and further barriers should not be created for them just to enroll in ILPs.

Reilly (2003) performed a qualitative study that consisted of 100 youth who had aged out of care at age 18; an in-depth interview was also used for each participant.
The study found that many youth participated in ILPs; however, the study reported less than acceptable ILP services. The study also indicated that few were offered services upon discharge. About a third of these individuals did not have anywhere to go once they aged out of care. This study also found that the greater amount of training, services, and job experience participants received, the more likely aged out youth would transition successfully to adulthood. These youth would also be more pleased with their foster care experience when they received extensive preparation for independent living.

Royse, Thyer, Padgett, and Logan (2001) indicated that it was important to get feedback from youth about ILPs to acknowledge the importance of consumer input. They also suggested that foster youth's input on what they dislike about ILPs can be beneficial if considered when designing ILPs. Reilly (2003) also found components in ILPs that needed improvement and ILP components that were working well. On the positive side, participants were pleased and felt that they benefited when they received various independent living skills that prepared them for transitions to adulthood. The negative findings indicated that many foster youth participants are displeased with ILP
services and disappointed that services were not even offered to them once they became emancipated.

Maluccio (1990) suggested that many research findings have shown that ILPs are effective in assisting youth in transitioning into adulthood; however, there are some criticisms that these programs only focus on hard skills, such as, housekeeping, money management, and job training. Maluccio’s recommends that ILPs put more emphasis on soft skills, such as, social skills and positive ways of dealing with emotions. Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt (2005) also reported that an area that should be further studied, as it holds promise for interventions, is empowering children and youth. The overarching emphasis is to recruit foster youth with more effective approaches, assess the likes and dislikes of ILPs to meet the majority of the participants’ needs, and offer services to these youth once they become emancipated.

The literature review indicated that foster youth needed to be better prepared for emancipation and ILPs needed to improve their outreach methods. Many of the studies reported that ILPs are effective; however, there are consistent findings that indicated that ILPs must be changed in order to become more satisfactory for foster
youth. Therefore, ILPs needed to be improved to meet those needs of foster youth. Finally, the literature also showed that there may be high expectations for foster youth to enroll and remain enrolled in ILPs. However, this literature review had its limitations because not many studies have been done that provide data on those foster youth who do not participate in ILPs, which was the rational for conducting this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

An overview of the research methods that were used in this study are presented in this chapter. The methods section includes the study design and sampling criteria. Details on the data collection and description on the type of instrument that was used are also provided. This section also includes the procedures, protection of human subjects, and a data analysis plan.

Study Design

The specific purpose of this study was to explore and identify characteristics in the foster youth population of ILP and non-ILP participants. In examining those distinguishing variables, the researcher provided information that is valuable for the ILP recruitment process. The researcher also identified individual characteristics that lead to ILP participation, which provided beneficial information to ILP coordinators. The goal of this project was to get a more comprehensive assessment of why youth do not take advantage of services
that have been proven to be of great assistance in transitioning to adulthood.

This study used a quantitative, secondary analysis, and an extraction form created by the researcher to examine the independent variables. The reason this method was chosen was because it was the most feasible, considering the available time to conduct the study. The researcher used a secondary analysis method to gather data that could possibly be used to improve ILP participation amongst the foster youth population. It was important to recognize and separate characteristics that help distinguish the ILP participants and non-ILP participants. By measuring these independent variables, the researcher identified those characteristics that make it more likely for foster youth to participate in ILP.

One of the limitations of this study was that the sample only consisted of those foster youth who were contacted by the ILP. Foster youth who were not referred to the ILP were not accessible for this study. Additionally, foster youth must be at least 16 years old to participate in ILP; however, the sample had 6 foster youth who had been referred to ILP at age 15. The extraction form was also constricted only to individual
characteristics that were available on the ILP/CMS database. The study was not able to gain direct information from participants, which resulted in a loss of quality data that is associated with human interaction. For example, the researcher was not able to ask the foster youth exactly what were the reasons he/she did or did not participate in ILP. This study aimed to measure the similarities and differences amongst ILP and non-ILP participants.

Sampling

The sample consisted of foster youth who were between the ages of 15 and 19, and who had been referred to ILP by either a social worker, care taker, or other concerned individual. The San Bernardino Department of Children’s Services gave its permission for the study to take place. The selection criterion consisted of males and females from any ethnic background. Some foster youth who were referred to the ILP did not necessarily participate; however, they were still accessible through the ILP database. The sample originally consisted of 30 ILP participants and 30 non-ILP participants; however, 3 participants and 6 non participants had to be ruled out because they were
transferred to a different county. The researcher did not have access to their records.

The sample was drawn out of the last quarter of the 2005-2006 ILP data base. There were a total of 831 foster youth referred to ILP during this year, and out of this total 600 youth did not participate in ILP services and only 231 did participate. For the purpose of this project participants are those youth who attended at least two ILP workshops. Once the foster youth were separated into two categories the researcher selected every 20th non ILP participant and every 7th ILP participant to ensure non biased selection.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was collected through a data extraction form that was created by the researcher. The extraction form consisted of 28 questions that identified characteristics of foster youth's likelihood of participating in ILPs. The data that was collected consisted of demographic variables of age, gender, and ethnicity. Other areas that were measured consisted of the amount ILP workshops attended, ILP follow ups, high school graduate or GED, grade level and likelihood of graduating,
employment history, adult or vocational school, number of placements, type of placements, duration of placements, age at first placement, duration of last placement, and whether they had important documents such as identification cards, birth certificates, and social security cards.

The instrument was created because there was no available instrument that extracts the precise data that was needed for this study. This extraction form was created by the researcher after critically thinking about the most important characteristics available in the ILP/CMS data base. This instrument had the advantage of extracting specific information that was necessary in making quality assessments on the likelihood of ILP participation. There has not been any other instrument designed for this specific purpose which makes it unique. A limitation of this instrument was that only data available through the ILP/CMS data base was collected, which means that valuable data that could be gained through human interaction was not recorded in this extraction form.

Procedures

Once the data was collected, it was reviewed and analyzed using the SPSS software. Most of the information
that was available, important, and necessary to identify
the characteristics of former foster youth was extracted
and recorded on the extraction form created by the
researcher. The researcher collected this data at the San
Bernardino Department of Children’s Services agency. The
data was collected January 1, 2007 through March 31, 2007.

Protection of Human Rights

The researcher protected the confidentiality of names,
social security numbers, and other identifying information
of the subjects that were studied. Identifying information
was not included in the study because the confidentiality
of the subjects was protected by assigning ID numbers to
participants. Additionally, data was collected through the
ILP/CMS data base and there was not any physical contact
made with the subjects. Therefore, the data that was
collected and entered into SPSS cannot be linked to the
subjects of the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data that was collected from the
extraction forms was analyzed using SPSS software. The
descriptive statistics also compared the similarities and
differences amongst the two groups that were analyzed. Furthermore, the data analysis used descriptive statistics to summarize each independent variable, which presented information on demographics, number, duration, and types of placements, educational experiences, employment experiences, ILP outreach, and ILP participation. Independent t-tests were conducted to compare the ILP participant group with the non-ILP participant group.

The instrument that was created by the researcher extracted information from a case file review. The researcher expected to find characteristics that distinguish ILP participants from non-ILP participants. The data analysis aimed to seek patterns in characteristics that influence ILP participation. The relationships among the variables will be evaluated using bi-variate statistics.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the research methods that were utilized to compare the differences and similarities amongst ILP and non-ILP participants. The ultimate goal of this study was to identify indicators that will lead to ILP participation so
that those foster youth who are lacking in those categories can be targeted with modern interventions so that they can increase their chances of ILP participation. ILP participation has been linked to successful outcomes amongst former foster youth; therefore it is important for foster youth to participate in ILP as much as possible. The sole results of this study are not intended to influence policy change and direct practice; however, the intentions are to combine this study with other similar studies to influence change.
CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents an overview of the research findings. The characteristics of foster youth enrolled in the ILP are described in this section. Foster youth's ILP participation findings, educational data, legal documents possession status, reasons for placement, and placement information will be summarized. In this section the results of the Chi-Square tests are also presented.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of foster youth enrolled in the ILP. There were a total of 60 participants in the research sample. The age range of the sample was 15 to 19 years with an average of 16.9 years (SD = 1.03). The participants for this study were sampled from the ILP database. When the age distribution is compared to foster youth who have been referred to ILPs, those youth who were 15 years of age were underrepresented. Out of 60 youth, only 6 were referred to ILP at age 15. This study found that participants from African, Hispanic, and
Caucasian ethnicities were almost equally represented, with African/Americans (31.7%), Hispanics (35%), and Caucasian (33.3%). Over 57% of the participants were female and 43% were male. Out of the 60 participants, 65% had no work experience; 16.7% were seeking employment; 13.3% foster youth were currently working; and 5% had previous work experience.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (N=60) (Mean= 16.9) (SD=1.037)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African/American</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Working</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working but has</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Employment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Working Experience</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the educational information that was extracted from those 60 youth who were referred to ILP. Out of the participants, 80% did not receive a high school diploma or GED and 18% did. Out of this sample, 50% of the foster youth were 12th graders; over 23% were 11th graders; and over 18% were 10th graders. Grade levels were not available for over 18% of the youth.

In this sample, there were over 11 participants who received their high school diploma and an additional 4 participants who were very likely to receive their high school diploma. Those 4 participants who were likely to receive their high school diploma are those foster youth who were performing well in school, or those who had already passed their high school exit exam. Eleven participants were likely to receive their high school diploma. These foster youth were not advanced students, but it was reported that they were slightly behind but extremely motivated or they were on track to receive their high school diploma. It was also not likely for twenty three foster youth to graduate because they were very behind in their academics and had a negative attitude about school. Two foster youth were special needs children, and the records for nine foster youth were not available.
because they transferred to a different county. Finally, the great majority of the participants (75%) had never received vocational training and only 25% did.

Table 2. Educational Information of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level (N=60) (Mean=11.51)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Progress (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely to graduate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely to graduate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not likely to graduate</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 provides Independent Living Program information. This study sample was composed of 30 ILP participants and 30 non ILP participants. The ILP
coordinators were reported to make follow-ups to 65% of the participants, in order to further outreach non-ILP participants and also to continue to encourage the ILP participants. Those who are considered non-ILP participants are those youth who did not participate in the ILP or only participated once. As stated earlier, there were 30 individuals who fell into this category. However, out of the 30 individuals who did participate in the ILP, nine of them attended between 2 and 5 ILP workshops; three attended between 6 and 8 ILP workshops; and 18 attended 9 or more ILP workshops.

Table 3. Independent Living Program Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in ILP (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP Follow Up (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of ILP Workshops Attended (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The foster youth who were included in this research project were placed in one of several placement types during their last or current placement in the foster care system. Table 4 shows the placement data that was extracted from these foster youth. The most common placement type for these foster youth was a group home, which consisted of 25% of the sample. The next common placement was a foster family agency, which consisted of 20% of the sample. The third most common placement was kin placement; this sample consisted of 15% of the foster youth. Guardianship and Non-Relative-Extended-family member both consisted of 8.3% of the sample and 1.7% of the foster youth was adopted.

Table 4 also shows the total number of placements the foster youth was in since she or he became involved in the child welfare system. About 57% of the foster youth were in 1 through 6 placements. About 12% of the sample was in 7 through 9 placements; 5% of foster youth were in 13 to 15 placements; another 5% were in 16 to 18 placements; 3.3% were in 10 to 12 placements; and another 3.3% were in 19 to 21 placements.

The most common age for this sample to be initially involved with the Department of Children Services was
between the age of 13 and 16 years. Over 38% of the sample was initially removed from their homes during this age group. An additional 15% of foster youth were first placed between the ages of 9 and 12; 13.3% of foster youth were placed between the age of 5 and 8; another 13.3% of foster youth were placed between the age of 1 and 4; and only 5.9% of foster youth were placed at age 17. Nearly half of the sample was in foster care for under a year. An additional 18.3% of foster youth were in the system between 1 and 2 years; 8.3% of foster youth were in placement between 2 and 3 years; 5% of foster youth were in placement over 4 years; and 3.3% were in placement between 3 and 4 years (see Table 4).
Table 4. Placement Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current or last Placement Type (N=60)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kin Placement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Family Agency</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Relative Extended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member (NRFM)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Placements (N=60)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
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<td>19-21</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age at First Placement (N=60)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of Months in Current or Last Placement (N=60)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>25-36</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-48</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>49-220</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 illustrates the reasons why the foster youth were initially placed in the foster care system. The most common reason why foster youth were placed in the child welfare system was child neglect. Out of this sample, 30% were placed in a placement because of child neglect. The next common reason for placement was parent incapacity, which consisted of 23.3% of foster youth. The reason for placement for 13.3% of foster youth was because of conversion. Out of this sample, 11.7% of youth were removed from their home because of sexual abuse; 11.7% were removed for physical abuse; 5% were removed because of a disability; 1.7% of youth were placed in foster care for other reasons; and no child was placed in foster care because of a parent's death.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Neglect (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>33</td>
<td>55.0</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<td>Physical Abuse (N=60)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse (N=60)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>73.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Death (N=60)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Incapacity (N=60)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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<td>61.7</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<td>Child Disability (N=60)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>80.0</td>
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<td>Missing</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<td>Conversion (N=60)</td>
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<td>.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (N=60)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 6, foster youth possession of legal documents was described. Out of the 60 participants, 28 of them had birth certificates on file; 28 of them had social security cards on file; and 6 had identification cards.

Table 6. Foster Youth Possession of Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth Certificate (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security Card (N=60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification Card (N=60)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A chi-square test was conducted to compare foster youth participation in ILPs and possession of a high school diploma or GED. The finding was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 8.683$, df = 1, $p = .003$). Foster youth who participate in the ILP were more likely to have a high school diploma or GED than those who did not participate in the ILP.
Another chi-square test was conducted to assess an association between participation in the ILP and participation in vocational training. This research finding was also statistically significant ($x^2 = 4.356$, df = 1, $p = .037$), which means that $p < .05$ indicates a statistically significant relationship. Out of 15 foster youth who attended vocational training 11 participated in the ILP.

Out of 27 foster youth who participated in the ILP for at least 2 sessions, 11 foster youth were placed in their last placement between 8 and 12 months. Additionally, these foster youth who were in their last placement between 8 and 12 months also accounted for 8 foster youth who participated in 9 or more ILP sessions. This finding was interesting because in a total of 17 foster youth who participated in over 8 ILP sessions 8 of them were in placement between 8 and 12 months. This finding may not be significant but draws attention to the need for further study to find out if there is a correlation with duration of last placement and ILP participation.
Summary

Interesting findings in the study were that the participants' ethnicity was for the most part equally represented by Latinos, African/Americans, and Caucasians. Results from this study also indicated that foster youth who participated in the ILP were likely to participate in vocational training. The study found that foster youth who had an increase in participation in the ILP were likely to obtain their high school diploma or GED.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study explored the characteristics of both ILP participants and non ILP participants. The research findings and the limitations in this study are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, implications for research, practice, and policy are provided in this section.

Research Findings

This study found that there was a statistically significant relationship between an increase in ILP participation and earning a high school diploma. Additionally, those foster youth who are more involved with ILPs are also more likely to graduate from high school. The study was significant in the fact that those foster youth who attended ILPs for more than 8 sessions were likely to possess or earn a high school diploma. This study’s findings are consistent with a study conducted by Georgiades (2005). Georgiades found that out of those foster youth who participated in the ILP, 53% of them received their GED or high school diploma as opposed to non
ILP participants where only 15% received their GED or high school diploma. Georgiades also found that it is more likely for ILP participants to receive a high school diploma than non-ILP participants.

Another significant finding in the study was that participation in vocational training was also correlated with participation in ILPs. Out of 15 foster youth who attended vocational training 11 participated in the ILP. Reilly (2003) indicated that foster youth were more satisfied with their foster youth employment experience when they received more areas of training. This may imply that foster youth who are involved in vocational training are more satisfied with their foster care experience and therefore participate in ILPs. There were no studies that compared vocational training to ILP participation with which this researcher could compare the findings. However, Georgiades (2005) indicated that foster youth who participate in ILPs may have an enhanced perception of themselves. Georgiade’s findings may explain why a foster youth chooses to enroll in vocational training. If a foster youth has an enhanced perception of self he or she is more likely to prepare for the future.
ILP recruitment begins at age 15 ½ but for some reason the average age of the research sample was 16.9 years. What this means is that the average foster youth is not involved in ILPs till nearly 1 ½ years after they are initially entitled to receive ILP services. Reilly (2003) found that the more preparation foster youth received toward independent living, the more satisfied they were with their foster care experience and their current lives.

Furthermore, Georgiades (2005) reported that foster youth are not sufficiently prepared to live independently and become overwhelmed when they emancipate. When foster youth who have been referred to ILPs were examined those youth who were 15 years of age were underrepresented. Out of the research sample of 60 participants, only 6 were referred to the ILP at age 15. The average youth who has been referred to ILP is 16.9 years of age and slightly over one year of preparing foster youth to transition to adulthood is not sufficient. Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) stated that states are expected to adequately prepare their foster youth for independent living.

No significant differences between the duration of the last placement the foster youth was in and ILP
participation was found. However, out of 27 foster youth who participated in the ILP for more than 1 session, 11 foster youth were placed in their last placement between 8 and 12 months. Out of these 11 foster youth 8 of them participated in 9 or more ILP sessions. This finding was interesting because of a total of 27 foster youth who participated in 1 or more ILP session 8 of them lived in their last placement between 8 and 12 months. Furthermore, out of 17 foster youth who participated in over 8 ILP sessions, 8 of them were in their last placement between 8 and 12 months. This represents nearly 50% of the youth in the research sample that participated in 9 or more ILP sessions. This finding may not be significant but draws attention to further study to find out if there is a correlation with duration of last placement and more ILP participation.

The research findings of this study indicated that ILP coordinators are enrolling and distributing ILP data to foster youth. However, enrollment in the ILP is not enough to assist these youth. This research found that out of 900 foster youth who were referred to ILP, only 210 participated in services. ILP coordinators definitely need to be credited for their recruitment efforts and enrollment
success. However, there must be another reason why foster youth do not continue to participate. These research findings also indicated that after an initial ILP contact or attendance of a few workshops, foster youth did not return for additional services. Georgiadis (2005) and Reilly (2003) provide a possible explanation for the reasons foster youth drop out of ILP. Georgiadis and Reilly found that many foster youth are dissatisfied with ILP services. It is important to note that this study was not able to measure the exact reasons why youth did not continue with ILP services. This study revealed that foster youth are being enrolled in ILPs and referred to workshops but they are not taking advantage of these services.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that affected the quality of the data that was collected and reported. First, the extraction form created by the researcher has not been proven to be a valid instrument. The extraction form was also constricted to only those individual characteristics that were available on the ILP and CMS data base. Specific questions related to characteristics that
lead or do not lead to ILP participation were not accessible by only collecting secondary data. The study was not able to gain direct information from participants, which resulted in a loss of quality data that is associated with human interaction.

Another limitation in this project was the small sample size of 60 participants from the County of San Bernardino who had been referred to the ILP. San Bernardino County has a large population of foster youth and a sample size of 60 is not sufficient enough to warrant the generalizability of the study findings for this population. Additionally, these 60 youth were drawn out of a pool of only 883 participants who had been referred to the ILP. This sample pool does not represent all the foster youth who are eligible for the ILP in San Bernardino (207 of these foster youth had participated in 2 or more ILP sessions and 676 of them participated no more than once). Therefore, many of those foster youth from San Bernardino County who were not referred to the ILP were also not accessible for this study.

In addition to the small sample size of 60 participants, the researcher was not able collect data for an additional 9 participants. During the data collection,
the researcher discovered that he could not collect data for 9 foster youth from the CMS database. Although these participants were available in the ILP database, the researcher did not have access to them on CMS because they had transferred to a different county. Therefore, the researcher was only able to collect data from the CMS database for 51 participants.

Another limitation in this study was the inadequate amount of research studies that have been conducted on the ILP. A limitation that continues to affect gaining access to those foster youth who have emancipated continues to be a factor in conducting research on this population.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

It is recommended that ILP coordinators put more emphasis on preparing foster youth for emancipation at an earlier age. This researcher recommends that foster youth should be able to participate in ILP services as soon as they turn 15 years of age. Although foster youth may be referred to the ILP at age 15 ½ the results in this study indicated that the average youth is only getting one year of ILP preparation before emancipating out of care.
Previous studies indicated that those foster youth who do participate in ILPs tend to do better than those who don’t. The current research is showing that ILPs can be beneficial to foster youth; however, further research is needed in efforts to improve this program. A specific area that needs further research is the measurement of those foster youth characteristics that lead to ILP participation. Collins (2001) conducted a study that supports that participation in ILPs is beneficial to foster youth outcomes. Collins stated that ILP participants are more likely to graduate from high school, gain stable employment, and live a self-sufficient life. However, there are few studies comparing those characteristics that lead to ILP and non-ILP participation. Therefore, this researcher recommends that these youth be further studied. By identifying and researching those youth who have taken advantage of the ILP it is possible to gain more insight on their characteristics. These characteristics can serve as guidelines for those interested in working with the foster youth population in order to improve their ILP participation rates.

The findings of the study indicated a significant relationship with a foster youth receiving a high school
diploma and attending at least 8 sessions of ILP participation. Therefore, it is imperative that one of the main goals for foster youth is to get them to participate for this duration or longer. The researcher recognizes that those individuals who have the closest attachments to these youth can have the most positive influence on their lives. Mennen and O’Keefe (2005) indicated that poor foster youth outcomes are due to poor decision making by social workers and suggested a stable attachment in the youths lives. This researcher recommends ILP coordinators, social workers, therapists, casa workers (mentors appointed by the court), or caretakers can form an attachment with the youth and be better able to encourage them to attend at least 9 ILP workshops. Foster youth’s chances of succeeding in life independently increase with attachments and satisfaction from ILPs.

Till this point, this study has presented research and provided findings that support that ILP participation is an essential element in the lives of transitioning foster youth. Additionally, this study has provided significant findings associated with participation of at least 9 ILP workshops and receiving a high school diploma or GED. Despite the findings on the positive impact ILPs have on
foster youth, ILPs are not being utilized sufficiently. For example, this study found that only about 31% of foster youth who had been referred to ILPs attended more than 1 ILP workshop. Out of 883 foster youth who were referred to ILP only 207 actually participated in more than 1 ILP workshop. This researcher recommends that policy and practice methods need to focus more on how to retain ILP participants in order to increase the amount of ILP workshops they attend.

This study also indicated that the ILP from San Bernardino County may be using an ILP outreach method that equally attracts African/Americans, Caucasians, and Latinos. A key issue is that such an equal distribution of race or ethnic groups reflect the reality of ethnic distribution of foster youth in San Bernardino County. The equal representation of diversity is a social work value that is being demonstrated in the ILP recruitment process. This draws interest for further studies to investigate how those foster youth that are enrolled in the ILP are selected. Perhaps San Bernardino’s ILPs method of selecting an equal proportionality of ethnicities can be used in other programs that have difficulty with diversity.
However, this sample was small and therefore cannot be used to make generalizations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify foster youth characteristics that were more likely to lead to ILP participation. This study found that there was a statistically significant relationship between an increase in ILP participation and earning a high school diploma. Another significant finding in the study was that participation in vocational training was also correlated with participation in ILPs. Foster youth who lived in their current or last placement between 8 and 12 months were nearly 50% more likely to participate in at least 9 ILP workshops. The average age for youth enrolled in ILP was 16.9 years, which means that they are only getting slightly over a year of ILP preparation. The research findings also indicated that after an initial ILP contact or attendance of a few workshops, foster youth did not return for additional services for one reason or another. Some of the limitations of the study included the use of an extraction form that has not been proven to be a valid instrument, a small sample size, and inadequate amount of
research studies on ILPs. Some suggestions to the social work profession included the recognition of literature reviews that have proven that those youth who take advantage of ILPs do better than those who don't. This researcher also suggested that it is critical that the foster youth have someone to motivate him or her to participate in at least 9 ILP workshops in order to increase the likelihood of the youth to transition successfully to adulthood.

This researcher also recommended that ILP recruitment should start at a younger age in order to better prepare foster youth for emancipation.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
Instrument for Extracting ILP and Non-ILP Participation Characteristics

1. Gender: (1) Male___ (2) Female___
2. Current Age:___
3. Ethnicity: ___
   — (1) Caucasian ___ — (4) African/American
   — (2) Latino/Hispanic ___ — (5) Asian/American
   — (3) Native American ___ — (6) Other

4. Age at first placement: ___
5. Number of placements: ___
6. Duration of time in current or last placement: ___

7. Did the foster youth receive a GED or High School Diploma: ___ (1) yes ___ (2) no
8. Current Grade Level: ___
9. Current academic progress:
   — (1) very likely to graduate
   — (2) likely to graduate
   — (3) not likely to graduate
   — (4) special needs child

Does the foster youth have the following documents:

10. Birth Certificate ___ (1) Yes ___ (2) No
11. Social Security Card ___ (1) Yes ___ (2) No
12. Identification Card ___ (1) Yes ___ (2) No
13. Drivers License ___ (1) Yes ___ (2) No

14. Does the foster youth have paid work experience:
   — (1) Currently working
   — (2) Not working but does have previous work experience
(3) Seeking employment
(4) No working experience

15. Is the foster youth enrolled in vocational training or adult school:
   (1) Yes   (2) No

Reason for initial placement; Check all that apply:

16. Child Neglect   (1) yes   (2) no
17. Physical Abuse   (1) yes   (2) no
18. Sexual Abuse   (1) yes   (2) no
19. Parent Death   (1) yes   (2) no
20. Parent Incapacity   (1) yes   (2) no
21. Child Disability   (1) yes   (2) no
22. Conversion   (1) yes   (2) no
23. Other   (1) yes   (2) no

24. Current or last placement type:
   (1) Kin Placement
   (2) Adoption Home
   (3) Foster Home
   (4) Group Home
   (5) Foster Family Agency
   (6) NREF
   (7) Guardianship
   (8) Other
25. Did the foster youth participate in ILP?
   (1) Yes (2) No

26. Was a follow up conducted in the recruitment process?
   (1) Yes (2) No

27. How long did the foster youth participate in ILP?
   (1) 0-1 sessions (2) 2-5 sessions
   (3) 2-8 sessions (4) over 8 sessions
APPENDIX B

AGENCY LETTER
Dr. Teresa Morris
Department of Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397

Dear Dr. Morris:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino that Raymond Acevedo has obtained consent from the Department of Children’s Services San Bernardino County to conduct the research project entitled "Characteristics of Independent Living Program and Non Independent Living Program participants."

If you have any questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact: Cathy Cimbalo, Director, at (909) 388-0242

Sincerely,

Cathy Cimbalo, Director
REFERENCES


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