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EMANCIPATED YOUTHS' PERSPECTIVE ON
TRANSITIONING INTO ADULTHOOD

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
DeAnn Petersen Russon

June 2008

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June 2008

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of transitional aged youth (N = 33) and their perceived preparedness for adulthood. In addition, mental health issues such as behavior/conduct problems and receipt of mental health services were also examined. The study used a quantitative study design and collected data from youth involved in two Independent Living Programs in Riverside County. The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Scale was utilized to collect data.

Descriptive analysis, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to examine independent living program workshops attended, mental health issues and receipt of services, and relationships between variables such as youths perceived level of preparedness, social development and living situations. Also, one open-ended question was analyzed using a method of looking at commonalities to identify strengths, and deficits' in perceived preparedness in transitional aged youth.

Results indicate that youth for the most part had attended workshops to prepare for independent living. Youth also reported having had mental health or conduct problems while in foster care, having received mental

health services while in care, but that services were not very helpful and most did not continue to use these services after emancipation. In addition, living situation was associated with the level of social development of youth with youth living with a relative having a higher degree of social development. Results also indicate that females had a higher level of social development than males. Youth also reported education and being more involved in their case and having more responsibility as being important in preparing for emancipation.

A discussion of findings, study limitations and recommendations are also presented.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Janet House girls

Lisa

Christina

Favi

Pricilla

Lorraine

Adriana

Wish you all the best!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The contents of Chapter One present an overview of the importance of providing needed services such as training, resources and interpersonal skills to transitioning aged youth from the foster care system as they are shifted into adulthood. This chapter includes a brief description of the current problems facing this population and the purpose behind the proposed study.

Problem Statement

It is estimated that in the United States there are 510,000 children living in out-of-home care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). According to Propp and colleagues (2003), nearly half of these youth in care reside in California and New York alone, with the rest scattered among other states. Each year in the USA, more than 26,000 youth age out of foster care when they reach the age of majority (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Even though preventing the placement of children in foster care and minimizing their length of stay is a child welfare priority, many children will spend a substantial amount of their

childhood living in foster care (Pecora et al., 2006). [Of these thousands of youth who reach the age of majority, usually 18 years, some will be prepared for adulthood and others will not.] In a national study, an estimated 3 percent of foster youth in a given year had no housing available after leaving foster care (Stoner, 1999).

Research studies indicate that former foster youth are at a high risk for negative social outcomes. According to Stoner (1999), these outcomes include homelessness, poverty, incarceration and unemployment. One estimate of the homeless population is that more than 50 percent end up homeless (Stoner, 1999). Furthermore, sixty percent of foster youth leave government care without a high school diploma (Stoner, 1999). Research also shows that on average, about half of the youth studied were not employed and those who were employed had histories of job instability and were paid less than their non-foster youth counterparts (Propp et al., 2003). Youth emancipating from foster care without a high school diploma are set up for failure in our system.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the numbers of jobs for people with less than a college education during the years of 1998-2008 will decrease as

the demand for college level jobs increases rapidly (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Despite the imminent need for foster care adolescents to be educated about transitional challenges and life after emancipation, only 46,200 of dependent youths are receiving Independent Living Services (ILP) nationally (Georgiades, 2005). In the foster system, when an adolescent turns 18, they are emancipated from the system. Leaving foster care is a major life event and process that involves transitioning from dependence on state accommodation and supports to so-called self-sufficiency (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006). Foster youth are expected to transition directly from childhood dependence into adult self-sufficiency. Unlike the experience of most young people who still live at home until their early twenties or longer and receive financial, social and emotional support, foster youth are left to be self-sufficient.

The goal of assuring a smooth and successful transition from foster care to self-sufficiency remains elusive for a significant proportion of former foster youth who have a difficult time making the transition to self-sufficiency (Stoner, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of transitional aged youths' received services, such as, daily living skills, money management, self care, and social development, and look at whether these services have helped them transition into productive adults.

Of the research that exists, emancipated foster youth are shown to be at a higher risk for negative outcomes than youth the same age that were not in foster care. These outcomes include homelessness, dropping out of high school, poverty, and unemployment (Leathers & Testa, 2006). Research also shows that, on average, about half of the youth studied were not employed and those who were employed had histories of job instability and were paid less than their non-foster youth counterparts (Propp et al., 2003).

Most children fluctuate between dependency and independence as they develop the skills and traits necessary to become responsible adults. Many youth at the age of 18 have community and family support systems to facilitate their independence. They have relatives that can lend them money or give them a place to live. They

have a parent who can cover car insurance or co-sign on a loan. They have teachers and friends to offer support and guidance. On the other hand, foster care youth do not have relatives to lend them money, families to support them or help them and rarely do they have teachers and/or friends who can offer proper guidance and support. They have become dependent on a system to raise them and teach them the important skills that will facilitate them in their transition to adulthood.

An often over-looked population in the child welfare system includes youth who are transitioning from the foster care system into a life independent of the child welfare system and who are legally separated from their biological parents (Propp, Ortega, & NewHeart, 2003). This crucial period of youth development becomes increasingly more problematic for youth who live in the foster care system. Youth who are living in out-of-home care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in our society and have become one of the worst problems in social work today (Stoner, 1999).

Transitioning youth describe themselves as feeling unprepared, insecure, and unsure of how to make the

transition from being connected to being independent (Propp et al., 2003). This growing problem is, at best, disconcerting. The primary objective of emancipation and involvement in independent living programs is to prepare foster youth to function in society without depending on public assistance. Statistics now show that many of our existing programs or services are not adequately preparing transitioning youth to become productive adults (Leathers & Testa, 2006).

There are many who are concerned with this population of transitioning youth. Social service agencies, law enforcement, victims of crimes committed by these youth and welfare agencies that struggle to meet their needs are just a few examples (Stoner, 1999). It is a community problem whose contributing service deficiency should concern every facet of our society. It is important to focus on this population because transitional youth struggle with serious behavioral problems, mental illness, educational deficits, job skill deficits and parental needs that impact these youth and prevent them from becoming productive adults (Stoner, 1999). In turn, these youth negatively impact society.

Significance of the Thesis

The significance of this thesis is to provide a heightened understanding and awareness of the transitioning youths' perceptions of preparedness, so that social service agencies and policy makers will be able to implement and target those services that will best facilitate the developmental process and transition of emancipated youth into productive adults. By gathering information and becoming aware of deficiencies in a system, social service agencies will be better equipped to offer services that will directly facilitate the transition to adulthood. As current policy and procedures become expanded and modified, independent living programs have a greater chance of increasing the number of foster youth who will transition out of the system successfully. By examining the implementing stage of the generalist model, an important question is posed - What are the emancipated youths' perspectives on transitioning into adulthood?

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The contents of Chapter Two will discuss current literature that discusses the services offered through independent living programs (ILPs) as well as explore research that shows ILPs providing positive outcomes for transitional youth and studies that show the opposite, that youth's needs are not being met by the current ILPs. Furthermore, it will look at literature that shows existing youths' perspectives on services and how that may have or may not have helped them transition into society as an adult.

This chapter will also briefly discuss the transition into adulthood as it pertains to all youth and discuss literature on several theories that have been studied and applied to the overwhelming amount of transitional aged youth who are not able to support themselves within our society after leaving the child welfare system. Lastly, this chapter will look at the literature that discusses the mental health issues of

transitional aged youth (TAY) and how that affects their needed services.

Services Needed

Historically, insufficient resources and assistance have been provided to young people leaving state care (Mendes et al., 2006). For many years, the needs of these young people for the most part have been ignored by the U.S. child welfare system (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006). In 1986, Congress amended the title IV-E of the Social Security Act to include Independent Living Programs, which made federal funds available to help the states prepare their foster youth (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

It was not until the John Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 that significant changes were made to further assist providing continued help to transitioning youth. This Act doubled that maximum amount of money states could draw each year and enabled independent living services to continue to the age of 21 (Georgiades, 2005; Courtney & Dworsky, 2006).

Independent living programs (ILPs) were designed to provide skills to youth, leaving the foster system, which would enable them to progress into adulthood. The skills

that are taught in these programs range from social development to independent living. "Social development skills may include communication, decision making, and anger management; independent living skills may include job skills, budgeting, household tasks, seeking housing, obtaining legal assistance, and utilizing community resources" (Montgomery, Donkoh, & Underhill, 2006 p. 1436). Although ILPs are common programs throughout public care systems, little evidence is available to show their effectiveness (USGAO, 1999).

In a study conducted by Montgomery, Donkoh and Underhill (2006), researchers concluded that some ILPs may improve educational, employment, and housing outcomes for youth leaving care. This study also suggested that ILPs may have protective effects for the youth who leave the public care system. However, the strength of the evidence can be offset by a small sample size, substantial variation in ILP design and reliance of self reported data (Montgomery et al., 2006). Furthermore, this study suggested that continued research would be needed to draw reliable conclusions on the effectiveness of ILPs (Montgomery, et al., 2006).

In another study conducted by Freunklich, Avery, and Padgett (2007), researchers found that professionals who were interviewed stated they had concerns about the issues impacting youth's preparedness for independent living. "The professionals were concerned that too much of the 'preparation' focuses on classroom instruction unconnected with the real challenges that youth face after discharged from care" (Freunklich, Avery & Padgett, 2007, p. 68). Another of the concerns was that youth did not have the opportunity to be actively involved in the planning for themselves and their living environments. "Youth's wishes about their placements and living arrangements after care generally were not honored; youths opportunities to participate in case reviews were limited; and youths voices were not sufficiently heard in court proceedings on their cases" (Freundlich, Avery & Padgett, 2007, p. 70).

In a study conducted by Georgiades (2005), it was found that foster youth who were involved in ILP's experienced fewer foster placements than non-ILP participants. More foster home placements constitute foster care drift, which can be very detrimental to a child's sense of belonging and attachment (Georgiades,

2005). According to Courtney and Barth, (1996) belonging and attachment are connected with the development of positive self-esteem which correlates with adjustment to adulthood.

In another study conducted by Leathers and Testa (2006), case workers were surveyed to find out information on needs and services offered to foster youth who had emancipated from the state of Illinois foster care system. "They found that the majority of the youth (60%) had not received any services such as counseling and independent living skills in the past month" (Leathers & Testa, 2006). This study also concluded that those youth with significant problems such as mental health needs or substance abuse were less likely to receive continued care after leaving the system (Leathers & Testa, 2006). Furthermore, those with behavioral problems and those struggling with education were less likely to stay in care. "Thus the apparent correlations between positive outcomes and receipt of services may be due to the provision of services to those who are more likely have positive outcomes with or without continued services" (Leathers & Testa, 2006, p. 493).

Youth's Perspectives

Many young adults in research studies have expressed a range of different feelings and attitudes about leaving the foster care system and transitioning into adulthood. In a study done by Greenen and Powers, (2007) it was found that many youth described the frustration with case managers making their decisions. They felt that having a say and taking part in their own decisions was an important aspect that impacted their adjustment into adulthood. "Foster youth and alumni described a frustrating paradox where they had little or no opportunity to practice skills of self-determination while in care, but are expected to suddenly be able to control and direct their lives once they are emancipated" (Greenen & Powers, 2007, p. 1090).

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Freundlich, Avery and Padgett, (2007) researchers found that many of the youth interviewed stated that their involvement in decisions regarding their care were very limited. In this same study, several youth discussed the importance of being assertive and making sure that their voices were heard by their case workers regarding reviews and planning efforts (Freundlich, Avery, & Padgett, 2007).

In another study conducted by Freundlich, & Avery, (2006) of New York City's foster care system, it was found that some of the youth expressed they felt prepared to leave the foster care system. Some of the respondents in the study expressed success in finding and maintaining employment because of the job preparation that was offered prior to leaving care (Freundlich, & Avery, 2006). "Respondents who expressed satisfaction with their preparation for independent living often focused on the fact that they were encouraged to stay in high school or obtain a GED and that they received strong preparation for work" (Freundlich, & Avery, 2006, p. 514). However, recent research has shown that on average, about half of the youth studied had not finished high school and were not employed (Propp et al., 2003).

Another perspective that is expressed by youth in the literature is a concern of the importance of connections with family or significant adults after leaving care. In a study conducted by Greenen and Powers (2007), participants expressed the importance of having a caring and long-term relationship with someone as they transitioned from care. "Agency representatives unanimously agreed that teens in care need mentors or

adults with whom they can develop relationships”
(Freundlich, & Avery, 2006, p. 514). Freunlich, & Avery
(2006) further suggest that states should require that a
specific adult be identified as a support system for
youth aging out of the foster care system and that the
adult has made a long-term commitment.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization of Transitioning into Adulthood

Becoming an adult is generally marked by completing
a series of transitions, which include: leaving home,
finishing school, starting a job, getting married, and
having children (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006). In a study
by Osgood and colleagues (2005), researchers found that
vulnerable young people, specifically those involved in
governmental programs, have significant challenges
compared to the general population for transitioning into
adulthood. Osgood and colleagues (2005) states, “If
middle-class college-bound youth pass through transition
on relatively well-greased wheels, the transition is
prone to be rough sledding for working-class non-college
bound youth, and it can be a minefield for vulnerable
populations” (p. 3). With this higher risk for negative

outcomes it is important to look at this stage of development for adolescence.

According to Erickson's Psychosocial theory in *Identity versus role confusion*, this stage discusses the importance of adolescence establishing their identity. "It is the transition period from childhood to adulthood when people examine the various roles they play and integrate these roles into a perception of self, and identity" (Erickson cited in Zastrow, & Kirst-Ashman, 2004 p. 254). Oftentimes within the foster care system, this stage of development can become stagnant and youth may not transition from this stage of development and struggle with their identity and perception of self.

Adolescence is a time of crucial growth and formulation of the identity of self. It is a time when teens become prepared to enter the world of adulthood. Teens must prepare for adulthood by learning to become proficient in many different areas of development. Usually these social transitions that occur before the entrance into adulthood are the development of skills that lead to productive employment, completion of school, marriage and parenthood (Stoner, 1999).

Social Systems theory is a good example of how support is important to the development of an individual. According to Payne, (2005) systems perspective is concerned with people's social connections and relationships. This theory is often applied to biological systems but is just as important to social systems such as families, groups and societies. By having a holistic approach and looking at all of the support a transitional aged youth may or may not have, can help explain the struggles encountered by foster youth as they emancipated from the foster care system.

One of the main themes in the reviewed literature regarding what could be changed within the system, was the need for transitional aged youth to become more involved in their decision making process. Giving foster youth the opportunity to voice their opinions and be involved in their decisions serves as an empowering process. "Empowerment seeks to help clients to gain power of decision and action over their own lives by reducing the effect of social or personal blocks to exercising existing power, thus increasing self-confidence" (Payne, 2005 p. 295). Involving youth in their own care, training and emancipating process will help to combat the

powerlessness and learned helplessness many feel after years in the system (Propp, Ortega, & NewHeart, 2003).

One of the main goals of the empowerment approach is to assist clients to enhance their own strengths and competence through participation and involvement in critical decisions. Empowering foster youth by giving them a choice to express their perceptions of independent living programs can be a vital part in improving said programs.

Mental Health

A large number of Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) struggle with mental health problems. "While a poor outcome for youth in foster care continues to gain greater visibility, the transition of foster youth who experience disabilities has largely been ignored" (Greenen & Powers, 2007 p. 1086). Many of the transitional youth who entered the foster care system as children, have grown up and relied on that system for their care. A recent national study by the Urban Institute found that, when compared with other children, foster care children had higher levels of emotional and behavior problems (Kortenkamp & Earl, 2002). Recent data

indicates that up to 80% of children entering the foster care system have significant mental health problems (Kerker & Dore, 2006). According to Simms, Dubowitz, and Szukagyi (2000), the high prevalence of mental health problems among children in foster care are partially due to the abuse or neglect that these children endured prior to being separated from their family. Furthermore, the emotional effects of physical, emotional and sexual abuse often predispose young people in care towards psychological disruption, depression and suicide (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006).

Kerker and Dore stated;

The mental health problems exhibited by foster youth range from relationship and coping difficulties; to emotional and behavioral disturbances, such as conduct disorder, attention disorders, aggressive behavior and self-destructive behavior, depression and delinquency; to severe and persistent mental disorders, such as autism and bipolar disorder.

(2006, p. 139)

According to Kerker and Dore (2006), the current system of mental health care for children in the United States fails to adequately address the unique mental

health needs of the youth and children in foster care. These children and youth grow up and leave a system that has not met their mental health needs. At the age of 18 they emancipate from the foster system with a continued unmet mental health need. Therefore, mental health problems continue to affect them as they "age out" of foster care and become transitional aged youth (TAY).

Summary

The need for effective programs to help foster youth transition into adulthood is essential. Having an understanding of transitional youth's perspective on services needed enables social service programs such as ILPs to increase services to assist youth in the transitioning process. Not only having an understanding, but incorporating this area is important in the development and evolution of independent living programs and will ultimately contribute to an increase in transitional aged youth's (TAY) success in adulthood.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study used a quantitative design method to examine the perceptions of former foster youths' ability to transition into adulthood. This chapter will further discuss the study's intended design, sampling methods, data collection and instrument, procedures, and protection of human subjects.

Study Design

The purpose of this research study is to gain a better insight from former foster youth who are utilizing aftercare service programs, such as independent living services in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. A key component of this study is to gain insight of the transitional youth's perceived preparedness in transitioning into society upon emancipation from the foster care system. Research has suggested that although there are many services available to emancipated youth, the overall outcome for this population remains poor and understudied.

The type of research design that would best implement and address the perspectives of transitioning youth is a quantitative approach. Also, by using a quantitative method, the researcher can use many different variables which can be used in gathering data to allow the instrument to show validity. This approach will make it more feasible to obtain a large sample size and to allow respondents to complete a survey in a time managed manner. In addition, one open-ended qualitative question will be incorporated into the questionnaire to allow for participants to provide additional comments and allow them opportunity to express their personal opinions.

This study explores this population's perception of services offered and gives direct feedback from the participant; the Transitional Aged Youth (TAY). Analyzing these perceptions provides valuable information to further assist in identifying areas of service strengths and identifying the deficiencies in service delivery. This information can be used to increase awareness and guide changes within the TAY population and services offered that help guide emancipated youth into productive adults within society.

Sampling

The selection criteria for participation in this study require that participants are between the ages of 18 and 21. All participants will be emancipated from the foster care system and will be enrolled in a transitional youth program, such as ILP, within Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Participants are identified through a convenience sampling method. Several agencies were approached within these counties to gain access to TAY who were involved in continuing care. The Harmony Center located in Riverside County has allowed access at this time and between 35 and 40 transitional aged youth (TAY) are given the instrument to complete for the collection of data. The Transitional Living Program located in Riverside also allowed access to the transitional aged youth that reside at the home.

Data Collection and Instruments

This research study primarily utilizes quantitative data, but also incorporates one qualitative question.

The instrument that will be used in this research study is a short form version of the Ansell-Casey Life Skill Assessment measurement with one added qualitative

open-ended questions. Four questions were added that addressed the mental health needs and concerns for transitioning youth.

The Life Skill Assessment survey is a three-point Likert-type scale designed to assess perceived level of preparedness in specific areas of independent living skills. This questionnaire includes demographic information that is used as an independent variable and compared to dependent variables such as social development and perceived preparedness. The one qualitative question is added to enable the Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) to further express their opinions and recommendations. These questions are analyzed by looking at the commonalities and significant statements

The Ansell-Casey Life Skill Assessment (ACLSA) measures the participant's perceived ability to successfully perform life skills. These skills include daily living skills, housing and community resources, money management, self-care, social development, and work/study skills. Some of these skills will be compared to independent variables such as age, gender, ethnicity to determine a correlation.

The ACLSA is a two part measuring tool which measures tangible skills and intangible skills. Tangible skills are those skills that are defined as what we "know how to do". Examples of such skills include money management, housing/transportation and daily living skills. Intangible skills are those skills which are used for interpersonal relationships and maintaining stability in employment. Examples of these skills are decision making, communication and social development (Casey Family Program, 2002).

The ACLSA is one of the life skill measurements scales that have been developed in the child welfare field to establish reliability and validity. Three approaches to validity have been explored: content, discriminate and criterion-related. Content validity was established through a comprehensive item-development process. This process is that the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment has been proven to measure life skill competencies of children and adolescents (Casey Family Program, 2002).

One of the limitations of the ACLSA may be its inability to measure all critical life skills. The survey was not designed to assess all the skills needed to live

independently. This scale is limited in predicting outcomes of self-sufficiency. However, this is one instrument known to the author that has been tested and used with transitioning youth to measure self-sufficiency. Another limitation that is identified by the researchers is the lack of information provided for the scale's testing on cultural sensitivity.

The one qualitative question was placed in the instrument to allow the participant to express themselves with open ended questions. This allows for further personal opinion and recommendations. The one question is as follows:

1. What more can the Independent Living Skills Program do to help you prepare to live on your own?

This question was chosen because it was consistent with questions based on the review of the literature.

Procedures

Participants in this study will be between the ages of 18 and 21 and will be identified as participating in some type of after care service program such as ILP. The Harmony Center in Riverside County has been contacted and

has allowed access to the agencies transitional aged youth. TAY utilizes this agency to acquire learning skills to help them succeed in the independent living process. The researcher held three groups that explain the process of taking the survey and distribute informed consents and debriefing statements. This took place throughout a one month time frame. The researcher will post a flyer to announce the group that will be held to enlist the voluntary participation of the Transitional Aged youth. The researcher had five to seven TAY attend each group.

All participants in the group will be given a copy of informed consent form to be notified of their rights as participants in the study. All participants will also receive a copy of a debriefing statement that describes the purpose of the study. All participants will be notified that participation is completely voluntary and they may leave the group at any time they feel they no longer want to participate.

Protection of Human Subjects

The participants in this study were provided with an informed consent which described the purpose and nature

of this study. All participants of this study were of the legal age between 18 and 21. This study provided confidentiality for all participants by informing them that no identifying information will be used in the study. The identifying mark on the survey is with an X, thus providing anonymity for all who participated. The rights and welfare of all participants were protected in that all participants were informed that this survey is completely voluntary and that they can discontinue participation at any time.

In addition, all participants were provided with a debriefing statement along with their survey as well as an opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns regarding participation.

Data Analysis

This study is a descriptive and exploratory analysis of the perceptions of Transitional Aged Youth who are currently involved in programs that help them transition into adulthood. The study primarily utilizes quantitative measures as well as the use of one qualitative question.

Bivariate analysis on selected study variables is used to determine the characteristics and the

distribution of participant's responses. In addition, descriptive statistics are used to obtain a summary of information about distribution, variability and central tendency of all continuous and categorical variables.

I utilized bivariate analysis that determined statistical differences in perceived preparedness, social development, ethnicity, age and gender. Some of the questions that are looked at are: Does age influence perceived preparedness in transition to adulthood? Does social development impact perceived preparedness in the TAY population? Does living situation affect the social development of Transitional aged youth?

I also looked at the frequencies of several questions that focus on the mental health needs of emancipated foster youth and Transitional aged youth. These questions in the survey are: I had behavior or conduct problems while in foster care? I received services for behavior or conduct problems while in foster care? These services helped me with my behavior problems? And Services continue to be provided since leaving the foster care system?

Furthermore, one open-ended qualitative question will be analyzed using qualitative methods of looking at

commonalities to identify strengths, and deficits' in program services and needs of the transitional aged youth (TAY).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of transitional aged youth and their perceived preparedness for adulthood. In order to analyze participants' perceptions, quantitative data was collected utilizing the ACLSA survey. The survey contained demographic information, 24 scaled questions, and one open-ended question, to allow participants additional feedback regarding their preparation for adulthood. Furthermore, bivariate analysis and T-tests and ANOVAs were done in order to obtain study results.

Presentation of the Findings

Descriptive analysis was used to determine the characteristics of demographic data, which included age, gender, ethnicity, education level and current living situation (See Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

| Characteristics (N = 33) | N or (%) |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 14 (42.4) |
| Female | 19 (57.6) |
| Ethnicity | |
| Latino/Hispanic | 18 (54.5) |
| Caucasian | 9 (27.3) |
| Other | 6 (18.2) |
| Age | |
| 18 Years | 16 (48.5) |
| 19 Years | 6 (18.2) |
| 20 Years | 7 (21.2) |
| 21 Years | 4 (12.1) |
| Education Level | |
| 12 th Grade | 16 (48.5) |
| College | 6 (18.2) |
| Vocational/Job Training | 2 (6.1) |
| Other | 9 (27.3) |
| Living Situation | |
| Living with Relatives | 14 (42.4) |
| Living In Transitional Housing | 14 (42.4) |
| Other | 5 (15.2) |

Table 1 presents descriptive data on the sample of Transitional Aged Youth. Of the 33 respondents who completed the survey, 57.6 % (n = 19) were female and 42.4 % (n = 14) were male.

The respondents were of a diverse ethnic population with the majority of respondents being Latino/Hispanic (54.4%). Caucasian respondents were (27.3%) and 'Other' at (18.2%). Due to the large sample size of Hispanic and Caucasian, the Ethnicity category was broken into three

categories with 'Other' representing African American, Asian American and Native American.

The ages of the respondents were between 18 and 21 years old. The majority of the respondents were 18 (48.5%) and 20 years old (21.2%). Additionally, 19 year old respondents were (18.2%) and 21 year olds were (12.1%).

Forty-eight percent (48.5%) of the respondents were in twelfth grade, (18.2%) in college, and (6.1%) reported enrolled in a trade school. Twenty-seven (27.3%) of the responded as Other.

The living situation among the respondents was reported as living with relatives (42.4%) and living in transitional housing as (42.4%). The living situation was also divided into three categories with 'Other' representing on my own, a foster home, or with family friends (see Table 1).

Table 2. Independent Living Program Workshops

| Workshops | Frequencies |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Daily Living Skills | |
| No | 33% |
| Yes | 68% |
| Housing/Community Resources | |
| No | 49% |
| Yes | 52% |
| Money Management | |
| No | 49% |
| Yes | 52% |
| Self Care | |
| No | 39% |
| Yes | 61% |
| Social Development | |
| No | 52% |
| Yes | 48% |
| Work & Study Skills | |
| No | 33% |
| Yes | 68% |

We were interested in looking at independent living programs workshops offered to transitioning youth as they are part of the transitioning process for foster youth. Daily Living Skills had 68% of the respondents attend and 33% did not. Housing and Community resource workshop showed almost a neutral response with 52% of the respondents attended and 49% had not. Money Management also showed an almost neutral response with 52% responded yes and 49% responded no. Self care workshops responded 61% yes and 39% no. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the

respondents did not attend social development classes while 48% did. Work and Study Skills were attended at 68% while 33% did not.

For our first research question we were interested in examining whether social development influenced perceived preparedness for adulthood. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to determine the relationship between social development and perceived preparedness. The results indicate that there was no relationship between the respondents social development and their perceived preparedness, $F(5,27) = .283$, $p < .05$.

For our second research question we were interested in examining whether living situation was associated with perceived preparedness. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to determine the relationship between living situation and perceived preparedness. The results indicate that there was no relationship between the respondents living situation and their perceived preparedness, $F(1,31) = .033$, $p < .05$.

For our third question we were interested in examining whether living situation influenced the participants' social development. A one-way analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was calculated to answer the question. Results indicate that living situation does influence social development, $F(2,28.45) = 3.97, p < .03$. The Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test was conducted in order to determine which living situation was significantly different. The results of this test indicate that statistical significant differences existed between living with relatives and living in transitional housing ($M_{\text{difference}} = -2.79, p = .026$). There were no statistical significant differences between living with relatives and other ($M_{\text{difference}} = -.62, p = .89$) and living in transitional housing and other ($M_{\text{difference}} = 2.17, p = .28$), indicating that former foster youth living with relatives had a higher level of social development.

For our fourth research question we were interested in examining whether gender played a significant role in social development among transitional youth. A t-test was used to compare the differences in social development among males and females. On average, females ($M = 15.95, SD = 2.74$) had a higher level of social development than males ($M = 13.86, SD = 2.79$). This difference was statistically significant ($t = 2.15, .040$), indicating that females have a higher level of social development.

Because we were also interested in exploring mental health issues among foster youth, four questions were created to examine behavior/conduct problems and receipt of mental health services. Questions were developed in a likert scale with three possible answers which included: not like me, somewhat like me, and very much like me. The first question asked if the youth had a behavior or conduct problems while in foster care. Not like me and somewhat like me had equal percentages with 36% respectively while very much like me only had 27%. The second question asked youth if they had received any services for behavior/conduct problems while in foster care. Not like me had 42% and somewhat like me had 39% while very much like me had the lowest percentage at 18%. Question three asked if the youth thought the services helped with their behavior/conduct problems with 46% indicating not like me. Twenty-one percent (21%) had somewhat like me and 33% had very much like me. Question four asked if the youth continued to receive services since leaving foster care. Forty-nine percent (49%) had somewhat like me and 36% had not like me, while 15% had very much like me (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mental Health Questions

| Questions | Frequencies |
|---|-------------|
| I had behavior/conduct problems while in foster care. | |
| Not like me | 36% |
| Somewhat like me | 36% |
| Very much like me | 27% |
| I received services for behavior/conduct problems while in foster care. | |
| Not like me | 42% |
| Somewhat like me | 39% |
| Very much like me | 18% |
| These services helped me with my behavior/conduct problems. | |
| Not like me | 46% |
| Somewhat like me | 21% |
| Very much like me | 33% |
| Services continue to be provided since leaving the foster care system. | |
| Not like me | 36% |
| Somewhat like me | 49% |
| Very much like me | 15% |

As part of the ACLSA survey participants were asked an open-ended question to determine what they felt would have prepared them better for their transition into adulthood and what they could have done differently to prepare themselves. There were three main themes that emerged from the surveys' question. One of the largest commonalities was that participants stated the importance

of education, whether it was paying more attention at school, or receiving more help to further their education. Another common theme throughout the respondent's surveys was that participants stated doing drugs had gotten in the way of them transitioning into adulthood. The third most commonality among the open-ended questions was the importance of being more involved with their case and having more responsibility.

Summary

The use of bivariate and one-way data analysis was used to perform the study's statistical results. Researchers utilized frequency distribution, descriptive analysis, t-test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine relationships between variables such as youths perceived level of preparedness, social development and living situations.

Also, one open-ended question was analyzed using a method of looking at commonalities to identify strengths, and deficits' in perceived preparedness in transitional aged youth.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussion of significant findings and implications for this study. In addition, the researcher will identify the limitations of the study and discuss recommendations for further research for social work practice.

Discussion

The study gathered quantitative information about the perceived preparedness of transitional aged youth as well as looked at the social development and how that affects perceived preparedness among emancipated foster youth. Youth involved in Independent Living Programs and Transitional Housing Programs shared their perceptions by responding to the ACLSA survey. The findings from this research study indicated several different perceptions.

Findings from this research study indicate that there were no statistical significance between living situation and perceived preparedness among the respondents. However, when living situation was compared to social development, there was a statistical

significance. The researcher used Tukey HSD to further examine what specific living situation was statistically significant with social development. Findings indicate that transitional youth who lived with a relative were more likely to be socially developed than those who lived in transitional housing or in other situations. These findings corroborate findings from previous research studies in that studies have found that it is important for foster youth to have a caring and long-term relationship, such as a family member or significant adult, as they transition out of care. This has been shown to assist transitional youth develop relationships that can be identified as a support system (Greenen & Powers, 2007).

However, when examining whether social development influences the transitional youth perceived preparedness, there were no statistically significant results. We were interested in examining this because social development can play a significant part in taking on adult responsibilities such as employment, housing, and interpersonal relationships. Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of why social development may or may not affect perceived preparedness.

This study also examined whether gender played a significant role in social development and perceived preparedness. Results from a t-test indicate that females had a higher level of social development than males. To date, the literature examining gender and social development is scarce so it is difficult to interpret results as they relate to previous research studies. However, it is important to examine because it raises the questions of whether males and females are receiving the same services and/or whether both genders may learn differently. If this is the case then programs may need to be modified to specifically meet the needs of both genders. Again, further research is needed to gain a better understanding as to why female transitional youth are more socially developed than males.

Independent Living Skills workshops were also examined using descriptive statistics. The percentages of classes taken from respondents were noted. Of these classes, the most common workshops attended were daily living skills and work & study skills. Looking at the literature, it suggests that professionals in the field of case management were concerned that too much preparation was focused on classroom instruction and not

enough focus on real life challenges that youth face (Freundlich et.al, 2006). Findings from this study shed light on these concerns as social development was the least attended workshop, where real life challenges might be the focus.

Descriptive data was run on the four questions regarding mental health issues. These issues were displayed as behavioral or conduct problems in foster care. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents agreed that they struggled with behavioral and conduct problems while in foster care. However, only 18% of these respondents state that they received services. This correlates with literature that suggests that the current system of mental health care for children in the United States fails to adequately address the unique mental health needs of the youth and children in foster care (Kerker, & Dore, 2006).

Furthermore, only 15% of the respondents stated that they continue to receive services. This is a common study finding in past research which indicates that youth with significant problems such as mental health needs or substance abuse are the least likely to receive continued care after leaving the foster care system.

Common themes among the open ended question reflected the need for the foster care system to offer more educational opportunities, whether it be stressing the importance of education, offering more classes in college preparedness or helping with the process of graduating high school. One respondent stated that a way to help better prepare for independence would be "better ways to promote how important education is". When examining former foster youth, the child welfare literature has shown that about half of emancipated youth have not graduated from high school or received a diploma. This corresponds with literature that states youth who expressed satisfaction with their preparation for independent living often focused on the fact that they were encouraged to stay in high school or obtain a GED and that they received strong preparation for work (Freundlich & Avery, 2006).

Another common theme among the open ended question was the expression of a lack of involvement in ones decisions. This correlates with past research and literature that states that many youth described the frustration with case managers making their decisions. They felt that having a say and taking part in their own

decisions was an important aspect that impacted their adjustment into adulthood (Greenen & Powers, 2007). Involving youth in their own care throughout the emancipating process will help alleviate the feeling of powerlessness and empower them to take control of their own lives.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the ACLSA was not designed to assess for all skills needed to live independently. Furthermore, the survey had only one question that focused on perceived preparedness. This made it difficult to run correlations and show significance. Due to the scale's inability to provide a comprehensive measurement of all life skill and perceived preparedness, the instrument cannot reliably predict future outcomes of self-sufficiency.

Another limitation is the study's small sample size. Due to the small number of study participants in one Independent Living Program and one Transitional Living Program, the researcher is unable to generalize the findings to a larger population of transitional aged youth in other similar programs. Furthermore, this study

utilized a convenience sample of ILSP participants in Riverside County. Therefore, this study's findings can only be useful to Riverside County's ILS programs, and cannot be generalized to any other Independent Living Skills Programs with different organizational characteristics.

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

Notwithstanding the limitations listed above, the researcher was able to gather information to recommend improvements for services offered to emancipated youth. A repeated theme throughout the qualitative data collected was the need for better services that promote education. Riverside County's ILS programs may want to focus on supportive services that address the importance of education and high school graduation.

Another noteworthy concern that resulted from the qualitative data was the interest in more involvement with the decision process of case work. The foster system is set up as an interdependent system that is disempowering youth by making decisions for them. Recommendations for policy change would be for a redefining of the caseworker's philosophy to a more

empowering system, where the foster youth could be involved in decision making that affects their lives.

Female respondents scored higher on social development than their counterparts. Taking this into consideration, the researcher would anticipate that ILS programs would look at gender equality within its services. With further research, Riverside County can determine the needs of male foster youth in preparing them in social development to aide in transitioning to adulthood.

One last finding indicated that the overwhelming majority of respondents in this survey, who were receiving ILS, were of Latino/Hispanic ethnic background. Riverside County's Independent Living Skills Programs may need to increase efforts to support participants who are of Hispanic/Latino culture to increase their likelihood of independent living outside of the systems care.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings from this research study cannot conclusively predict the preparedness of youth in transitioning to adulthood. However, findings do indicate that transitional aged youth have some concerns and

perceptions regarding the services they receive in the ILS programs.

The study showed significant findings regarding social development and its relationship to living situation and gender. Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the relationship between social development and perceived preparedness.

As foster youth are provided opportunities to become more involved in their lives by making decisions in their case plans and decisions about their future, they may become more invested in life's goals and their transition into adulthood.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Independent Living Survey

Instructions: Answer all questions; there is no right or wrong answer. Check answer that applies.

1. Sex: M ___ F ___
2. Age: 18 ___ 19 ___
20 ___ 21 ___
3. Grade in School: 12 ___ Trade School ___
In college ___ Other ___
4. Ethnicity:
___ African American ___ Caucasian
___ Latino/Hispanic ___ Asian American
___ Native American ___ Other (Please Specify _____)
5. Length of time in the Independent Living Program: ___ month(s) ___ year(s)
6. What is your current Living Situation? (check best answer)
___ In a family home where no adults are related to you (foster home)
___ With Relatives
___ In a transitional living arrangement
___ On my own
___ With family friends
___ Other
7. Mark all the services that you have received from the Independent Living Program:
___ Bus Pass ___ College & Vocational Scholarship
___ Career Counseling ___ Behind the Wheel Driving Training
___ Tutoring ___ \$35.00 Gift Certificate for getting GED
___ First time union dues ___ \$50.00 Gift Certificate for High School Grad
___ ILP Newsletter ___ Senior Expense Package
___ Resource Package ___ Clothing for Job Interviews
___ Uniforms/Tools ___ Shared Cost for housing/Apt
___ Exit Package ___ Shared Cost for utilities
___ Other (please Specify) _____

8. Please mark all the workshop(s), seminar(s), classes that you have attended:
- Daily Living Skills (*nutrition, menu planning, grocery shopping, meal preparation, kitchen clean up, food storage, home management and home safety*)
- Housing & Community (*housing, transportation and community resources*) Resources:
- Money Management: (*beliefs about money, savings, income tax, banking and credit, budgeting/spending plan and consumer skills*)
- Self-Care: (*hygiene, health, alcohol, drug & tobacco care, sexuality*)
- Social Development: (*self-esteem, cultural awareness, communication, conflict Resolution, goal setting, anger management, relationship Skills*)
- Work & Study Skills: (*career planning, job hunting, employment, decision making and study skills*)

8. Answer the following questions by circling the answer that best describes the statement.

- a. I ask questions to make sure I understand something that someone has said.
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- b. I can explain the education or training needed for my career options
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- c. I can name three ways to find out about job openings.
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- d. I can explain why good job references are important.
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- e. I think about how my choices affect my future a year or more from now.
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- f. I get help if my feelings bother me
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- g. I deal with anger without using violence
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- h. I know how to wash my clothes according to the label
 Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me

- i. I fix meals for myself on my own
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- j. I follow the basic fire prevention and safety rules where I live
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- k. I can contact places around where I live to get information on sex and
Pregnancy.
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- l. I can explain how to establish and maintain good credit
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- m. I can name two ways to save money on things I buy
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- n. I talk over problems with a friend
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- o. I talk with an adult I feel close to
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- p. I am polite to others
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- q. I respect other people's ways of looking at things, their lifestyle, their
attitudes
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- r. I look over my work for mistakes
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- s. I prepare for exams and presentations
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- t. I use the library, newspaper, computer, internet or other resources to get
Information.
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- u. I had behavior or conduct problems while in foster care?
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me
- v. I received services for behavior or conduct problems while in foster care?
Not like me Somewhat like me Very much like me

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore your perceptions on the services you received while in foster care that helped prepare you for adulthood. This study is being conducted by DeAnn P. Russon under the supervision of Ms. Margarita Villagrana, faculty supervisor at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Institutional Review Board sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked to answer questions on a survey that will take you approximately 20 minutes. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher. Your name will not be reported with your response. All data will be reported in group form only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion in the summer of 2008.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any question and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study: however, the benefits are that the social welfare system will be able to gain further insight for making informed decisions regarding emancipated youth in the future.

When you have completed the survey, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. Please do not discuss this study with other participants so they will feel free to give their own opinions.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Ms. Margarita Villagrana at (909) 537-5001.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark here

Today's Date _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

STUDY OF EMANCIPATED YOUTHS' PERSPECTIVE ON NEEDED
SERVICES TO TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The research study that you have just completed was conducted by DeAnn Russon, a graduate student in the department of social work at California State University San Bernardino. It was designed to gather information regarding transitional aged youths' (TAY) perspective on the services that they have received to prepare them to enter into society and become independent. Skills for preparedness were evaluated in two separate categories. First, hard skills, which are those skills that prepare youth to gain employment, balance finances and retain housing. Second, were soft skills, which are those skills that prepare youth to maintain interpersonal relationships through communication, anger management and decision making. I am particularly interested in seeing if youth in this program feel as if they are adequately prepared for successful adult transition.

If you feel uncomfortable or distressed as a result of participating in this study, you are advised to contact your social worker or probation officer to receive counseling services.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the survey with other youth involved in this program. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Ms. Margarita Villagrana at (909) 539-5501. Group results from the study can be obtained at the Pfau Library at California State University San Bernardino in the summer of 2008.

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