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SATISFACTION OF INDEPENDENT LIVING
PROGRAMS AMONG FOSTER YOUTH

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

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

by
Monica Sapien
Nadia Fuentes

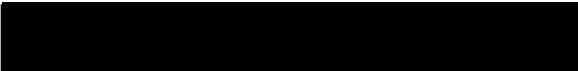
June 2009

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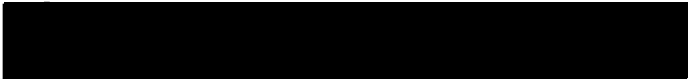


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the satisfaction of Independent Living Programs (ILPs) among foster youth. The research conducted consisted of a quantitative analysis of foster youths' satisfaction with various components of the ILP offered through Orangewood Children's Foundation. The study utilized a survey design method, which also included three open-ended questions to allow the participants to provide additional feedback. The research revealed that the majority of the participants enrolled in Orangewood Children's Foundation ILP were satisfied with the services being offered by the agency.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge our families who have supported us throughout the writing of this thesis. We would also like to acknowledge our friends who have uplifted us when we needed it the most. We want to acknowledge the faculty and staff of the Social Work Department, without them we would not be where we are today. We also want to acknowledge our faculty advisor, Laurel E. Brown, for her time and dedication in steering us onto the right path. We would like to acknowledge Mike McKenzie of Orangewood Children's Foundation for his support of this study and for allowing us to work with the youth his agency serves. Lastly, but not least, we would like to acknowledge the youth of Orangewood Children's Foundation for giving us the privilege of taking a glimpse into their life experiences.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to my precious daughter. You have been the sunlight to many dark and weary days. Your smile, your laughter, and your carefree spirit have kept my heart beating. I would also like to thank the Lord for leading me on this amazing journey. Your word has been true and you have carried me when I could no longer stand. I would like to thank my family for believing in me and encouraging me when I was tempted to walk away. I would also like to give a special thank you to my dear friend Deanna. Beside my Lord and Savior, you have been the rock beneath my feet.

Nadia Fuentes

I would like to thank my beautiful family for their unconditional love and support. You have seen me struggle throughout this process and have continuously encouraged me to stay strong and finish, thank you! It is because of all of you that I found the strength, drive, and desire to continue this long journey. I would also like to thank my best friend Aaron. Thank you for believing in me and loving me with all of your heart. You have seen me go through every single emotion imaginable and have still chosen to stand by my side. I love you!

Monica Sapien

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

To say youth in the process of emancipation are lacking the resources and know how to make the transition to independence is an understatement. Each year, approximately 26,000 adolescents exit the foster care system on their eighteenth birthday (The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Studies indicate that there were 4,521 foster youth ages 16-20 that emancipated from the foster system from April, 2007-May, 2008. This estimates to approximately 13% of all children in the California foster care system (UC Berkeley). This population looks forward to reach the goal of successful independent living. Unfortunately, statistics reveal these disadvantaged youths are often still left unprepared after their involvement in the Independent Living Programs (ILP) currently available to them. As the number of youths transitioning each year from out-of-home care to independence grows, so does the need to improve the methods to facilitate this.

Problem Statement

Spurred by the obstacles facing the youths in transition from out-of-home care to independence, Congress created a new Independent Living Initiative (P.L. 99-272) in 1986 to better equip older foster youth with the task of emancipation. This initiative provides states funding through a new Section 477 of the Social Security Act. This was succeeded in 1999 with the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act (P.L. 106-169), whereas the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) replaced the Independent Living Program. With the creation of the ILP, its funding increased from \$70 million to \$140 million annually (Congressional Research Service, 2008). This law also included a larger population of youth who qualified to receive the independent living services and gave the states the authority to design independent living programs. Such programs offer guidance and assistance in receiving education, vocational training, daily living skills, pregnancy and substance abuse prevention, preventative health and connections with adults.

The Chafee Act required that states use training funds to aid foster and adoptive parents, group home

workers and case managers with the task of adequately preparing foster youth for independent living. It was also made visible that assistance was needed for the 18 to 21 age group that had left foster care and some portion of the funding was to be allocated here. In fact, up to 30 percent of the Independent Living Program funds for room and board could be used to aid the 18 to 21 age group. Recognizing the need to make available more resources for health care, states were given the authorization to extend Medicaid to 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who have been emancipated. Prior to the Chafee Act, no persons under the age of 16 were able to receive help in preparing for self-sufficiency, this assistance was now provided to that younger population, also allowing for a variety of providers to provide independent living services. The federal foster care program now allowed a youth to accumulate up to \$10,000 in savings versus the previous \$1,000 and still be able to receive foster care payments (Independent Living CASA Manual, 2005).

Child Protective Services (CPS) policy is to establish the permanency goal of independent living and the ability to function effectively as an adult for youth

in long-term foster care when all other permanency plans of guardianship and adoption have been exhausted and deemed unattainable. To accomplish this objective CPS has developed four essential components for the goal of independent living and self-sufficiency; 1) training to provide the necessary skills required to live independently; daily living skills, success in education and employment, interpersonal relationships, functioning emotionally as an adult, health and family planning, legal rights and responsibilities, knowledge of community systems and services. 2) Mentorship 3) Incentives for Graduation (\$100 for a graduation certificate or GED), Training (\$50 for certificate of completion of Independent Living Skills Training and a savings match of two dollars for every one dollar (up to a maximum match of \$400) which must be requested up to 45 days prior to the youth's last day in care. 4) Voluntary foster care for young adults 18 through 20 years of age (Independent Living CASA Manual, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our research study was to assess the satisfaction of Independent Living Programs among foster

adolescents participating in Orangewood Children's Foundation's Independent Living Skills Program. By understanding the factors that guide foster adolescents into successful transition, professionals can focus on improving and modifying areas that are ineffective and unsuccessful to foster youth. In addition, we were able to identify which support services were beneficial and were meeting the distinctive needs of foster adolescents.

It is evident that foster youth preparing to exit the foster care system need a great amount of assistance transitioning to independent living. They are at risk for various negative outcomes such as uneducated, living on the streets, lack of health care, unemployment, and no support networks. Not only are these adolescents transitioning out of the foster care system, but are transitioning into adulthood. Transitioning into adulthood within itself may become a difficult task to accomplish productively. Adolescents who have been in the foster care system are unable to transition smoothly into this stage of life. Most non foster adolescents grow up in a stable and supportive environment where they are taught the essential skills necessary to adapt to

independent living. Unfortunately, this is not the case for foster youth.

Countless foster youth spend a great amount of time moving from one placement to another. Regrettably, many of these foster youth never reunite with their family making the system responsible for raising these children. Due to the lack of stability and familial support, foster youth have a difficult time accomplishing those basic skills that everyone needs to acquire to become a productive member of society. For example, balancing a check book, maintaining stable employment, health insurance, and receiving a high school education become challenging tasks to acquire.

In order to assist this vulnerable population, we must identify what is effective and what is ineffective in independent living programs. It is essential to examine previous literature and identify what areas foster youth are lacking. Understanding foster care and foster youth background will better help professionals assist and make a difference in foster adolescent's lives.

The type of research design that best addressed the needs of foster youth transitioning from the system was a

quantitative and exploratory approach. A quantitative approach allowed for gaining the greatest number of respondents through a survey. The study consisted of a self-administered survey questionnaire design. Through using this design, we were able to gain insight on how and what areas foster adolescent getting ready to emancipate feel is beneficial and what is not. The end of the survey consisted of three open-ended questions to allow the participants to elaborate on the subject matter.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The need to conduct this study arose from the researcher's desire to gain awareness of the factors that lead to foster youth's successful transition to adult living. In order to achieve this, it is important to allow opportunities for foster youth to share their perspectives on the programs and services being offered. Foster youth should have the opportunity to voice their opinions, and provide input and suggestions on their programs. They are the "experts" of their own lives.

By conducting this research, we hope to assist independent living program social workers and other

professionals to better prepare foster youth for independent living. It is important to assess the current programs that are being provided for foster youth to determine whether or not these services are beneficial or detrimental. In order to determine this, we must closely examine foster youths satisfaction rate on the programs that are currently being offered. Additionally, there is lack of updated research on independent living programs. There is limited knowledge of the satisfaction rate of client's enrolled in independent living programs.

As a result of our study, it is expected that professionals and foster youth advocates will be able to better recognize what implementations need to occur within social work to ensure higher success outcomes for foster youth. It may also assist the Department of Public Social Services as a whole to better prepare and guide adolescents, and those professionals directly involved with independent living programs to take on the position of responsibility within society. Ultimately, we hope to create an interest among professionals and facilitators, who work directly with transitional youth, to conduct further research amongst the issues that foster youth are facing upon exiting the foster care system.

We examined the factors that contributed to satisfaction of independent living programs through the client's input. We hypothesize that seeking foster youths' level of satisfaction of independent living programs would allow for necessary modifications to be made to such programs in order to ensure foster youths' successful transition out of care.

Our study is relevant to child welfare practice because it can give the field better insight of what services are considered successful and effective, through the client's perspective. It could also bring awareness of what programs are unproductive and unsuccessful. By closely examining the subjects' perspectives, we may be able to provide more effective ways of preparing foster youth for emancipation for adolescents within child welfare. Overall, there is a lack of research and knowledge on independent living programs and the transitional stage that foster youth must undergo.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of previous studies on Independent Living Programs (ILPs). In addition, it discusses several areas of concern that are currently affecting foster youth emancipating from out-of-home care successfully such as employment, housing, health, education and lack of support. Furthermore, to better understand what is needed for successful transition, caseworkers' perspectives and most importantly, that of foster youth will also be examined.

Early Outcomes for Youth Transitioning from Out-Of-Home Care

Courtney and Dworsky (2006) conducted a study on adult functioning of former foster care youth in three Midwestern states. This study tracked the well-being of foster youth in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin as they transition to independence. This study was based on the 603 youth having "aged out" of the system for on average of one year, putting them at about the age of 19. Although 603 is miniscule compared to the approximately

20,000 who age out of the out-of-home care each year in the US, it is intended to be a microcosm of the larger population as its results are similar to those throughout the nation. All of the participants were placed into the care of the state welfare system due to neglect and or abuse and all had done so prior to their 16th birthday. The youth in this study were compared to a sample group of 19 year olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. In the areas of education, employment, economic security and criminal behavior, the young adults who were or are still in the foster system fared worse when compared to their peers in comparison study. While a small percentage of the participants had the desired outcomes of pursuing an education and or maintaining employment, the vast majority had many negative outcomes; lack of education, unemployment, substance abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system and having children of their own they are struggling or unable to properly care for.

However, not all findings in the study were negative. When comparing the overall outcomes of the young adults who remained in care after their 18th birthday versus those who chose to leave the system, it

clearly is beneficial to stay connected to the system. This allows greater access to much needed resources at a point in their young lives when support was obviously still needed.

Social Support

Foster care was not designed to be permanent. Its purpose was to provide care for children living in unsafe and dangerous circumstances while supportive services were offered to their families with a goal of family reunification. However, thousands of children and youth find themselves growing up in out-of-home care.

Unfortunately, many of these children find themselves in the foster care system until their eighteenth birthday without a lifelong connection. Former foster youth believe that developing relationships with non foster care peers and personnel for foster youth exiting the system is fundamental for adolescents getting ready to emancipate. It is vital to create meaningful relationships outside the foster care system. According to a study conducted by California Permanency for Youth Project (2004), permanency is difficult to achieve if foster youth do not have people in their lives to whom

they have a permanent connection. Typically, foster youth have a network of only professionals such as, social workers, attorneys, care providers or people linked with the foster care system. Usually, after adolescents emancipate, connection with these professionals is cut off. Once they leave the foster care system, the chances of youth finding or creating meaningful relationships with people other than those involved in the foster care system is less likely to occur. It is suggested that professionals encourage the youth, while still in care, to establish friendships and network with people other than those involved with the foster care system. Many former foster care adolescents revealed that it was necessary to develop healthy and functioning relationships.

Reilly (2003) studied 100 former foster youths six to thirty-six months after emancipating from out-of-home care in Nevada. Even though most adolescents (37%-73%) were exposed to support services during their time in care, only a minimal amount reported receiving actual services on emancipation. According to Reilly (2003), most of the participants reported contact with siblings (74%), relatives (63%), former foster parents (54%),

grandparents (45%), their birthmothers (37%), group home staff (35%), their birthfathers (30%), or previous caseworkers (29%). Additionally, these youths reported they had strong relationships with siblings (64%), and former foster parents (54%), and the majority of these youth having family (52%) or friends (58%) to rely on when they encountered problems. Adolescents reported that relationships with people who care about them and are there for them on a regular basis made all the difference in their lives.

Overall, it is important to establish a support network in developing a foundation for independent living. Whether it be family, social or community support, it is essential for every foster youth to establish a lifelong connection for a more successful transition to independent living. Linking children with lifelong adults is a way in with stability and permanency can be achieved for foster youth.

Housing

Acquiring secure and stable housing causes a critical dilemma for foster adolescents who are getting ready to emancipate from the foster care system. Roman

and Wolfe (as cited in Giffords, Alonso, & Bell, 2007) discovered that within the homeless population there was a disproportionate amount of individuals with a history of being a part of the foster care system. The Children's Aid Society (as cited in Giffords et al., 2007) stated that as much as 30% of young people in one study who were discharged to themselves in different states struggled with homelessness.

Under the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act (P.L. 108-96), the Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth was created (TLP). The funding provides organizations the means to support the housing needs of 16 to 21 year olds become self sufficient (Giffords, Alonso, & Bell, 2007). Evaluated in this study is one such transitional community based housing program known as "Walkabouts." Through this program, housing is provided as well as support intended to teach independent living skills by the way of money management training, vocational and educational planning, counseling, health and medical services.

Although much greater funding could be used to maintain and allow proper functioning of such a multifaceted program, the outcomes for the youth involved

are commendable. The program is providing its young adults with counseling, peer mentors serving as positive role models and employment counselors providing the required job related skills. Through self esteem building and self empowering the transitioning young people move more successfully towards emancipation, leading to permanent and stable housing.

Education

Foster youth have been found to lack the same academic achievement as those youth who are not in the system. It is important to understand this problem because approximately 20,000 teens per year age out of foster care and of those, 46% do not complete high school compared to 16% in the general population, also 33% are below grade level in reading, writing, and math (Department of Children's Services, San Bernardino). In essence, the number of foster youth that do not complete high school almost triples that of the youth not in the system that also do not complete high school. Such a disparity is alarming.

One study done was focusing on the relationship between measures of placement restrictiveness and

educational achievement (Mech & Fung, 1999). Their study found that out of 171 former foster youth students, 25.7% had completed 11th grade or less, 7.6% received their GED, and 24% received a high school diploma or equivalent (Mech & Fung 1999). The results of their study were that the number of foster youths that were unable to complete high school increased as placement restrictiveness increased (Mech & Fung, 1999).

In addition, another study examined long-term outcomes for persons ages 25 who had been in foster care during there teenage years (Vinnerljung & Sallnas, 2008). This study found that young men and women who had entered the foster care system as teenagers had "very high rates of premature death, prison sentences and of legal sanctions for serious involvement in crime, hospitalizations for mental-health problems, teenage parenthood, self-support problems, and low educational attainment" (Vinnerljung & Sallnas, 2008, p. 152).

A different study examined the intervention program, Education Initiative, to evaluate its effectiveness. This program was established to increase the responsiveness of social workers to the educational needs of foster children (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2005). In this study

the authors discussed that youth in foster care have been seen to demonstrate many academic difficulties. Some of those difficulties identified were: weaker cognitive abilities, lower academic achievement and classroom performance (Zetlin et al., 2005).

As illustrated, having mediocre educational experiences will only further foster youths' struggles in becoming successful adults. It has been found that "two to four years after leaving care, fifty percent still have not earned a high school diploma" (The California State University). Having a high school diploma is the minimum of what potential employees need to be able to find employment. Without at least a high school diploma, it is virtually impossible to enter the work force. It is evident that the lack of educational attainment has severe negative implications for foster youths' future.

Employment

Tied closely to academic success is the successful integration into the workforce by foster youth once they have reached legal working age and or have exited the foster care system. Not only should independent living programs be providing academic assistance, they should be

preparing foster youth for their overall transition into adulthood which includes workforce preparation.

However, there have been other obstacles outside the realm of the foster care system identified by researchers to cause difficulty for foster youth to successfully enter the workforce and transition into adulthood in general. For example, Wade and Dixon (2006) explain that there has been a decline in the youth labor market, and that employers are seeking to employ those individuals with a higher level of education and or training. Two other factors identified as obstacles for foster youth were a shortage in affordable housing, and the implementation of welfare policies that were designed to discourage youth from leaving their homes (Wade & Dixon, 2006). Such factors, coupled with the hard reality that most foster youth are pushed into adulthood at a premature age, add to the high risk of unemployment and homelessness for foster youth. In their study, Wade and Dixon (2006) found that of the 106 former foster youth interviewed 12-15 months after care, 44% were unemployed, 23% were engaged in full-time or part-time education, 6% were in trainings, 13% had limited opportunities for permanent or casual work, and 8% were caring for a child.

The findings of Wade and Dixon further illustrate that it is likely that foster youth are exiting the foster care system without the knowledge and preparation to successfully transition into the workforce and adulthood. This poses the question then as to whether or not ILPs are designed to best equip foster youth for such an important transition in their lives. Such desired knowledge provides an opportunity to seek answers from foster youth themselves. Foster youth should be given the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings as to the adequacy in the services they receive from ILPs. Their insight may prove to be extremely beneficial to the direction and implementation of ILPs.

Health

Youth who are in foster care tend to have considerably more health problems than those who are not (Hansen, Kagle, & Black, as cited in Schneiderman, Brooks, Facher, & Amis, 2007). Aside from some more basic health problems, foster youth also tend to suffer from a large array of chronic health problems. Some of those include: asthma, anemia, recurrent ear infections, and neurological abnormalities (Halfon, Mondonca, &

Berkowitz, as cited in Schneiderman, Brooks, Facher, & Amis, 2007). Such health problems that foster youth face may be due to prior negligence by their caregivers before being placed in foster care, inadequate and inconsistent health care once in the foster system, and or inadequate nutrition.

Findings on foster youths' inappropriate level of health give insight into the possibility that not only are foster youth lacking in skills for maintaining proper health, so may be their caregivers. If foster youth can not attain proper skills to maintain their health while in the foster care system, they are at further risk for health problems once they exit the system. Such realities should promote further health skills building in the ILPs offered to foster youth.

Clients' Satisfaction

Having foster adolescents participate and play an active role in the process of independent living programs is one of the key factors in the transition into independent living. A study conducted through California Permanency for Youth Project reported that foster youth expressed the importance of asking them what they feel,

and wanted people to listen to their needs. It points out that youths voices and feelings are often overlooked. Every child should have the opportunity to suggest and recommend what may be of best interest for them (California Permanency for Youth Project, 2004). Whether you ask a youth about future goals or lifelong connections, it is important to communicate with them.

Geene and Powers (2007) conducted a qualitative study about the experiences of youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood, from the perspectives of youth themselves, as well as foster parents and professionals. Data was obtained from 10 focus groups with a total of 88 participants, including 19 youth currently in foster care, 8 foster care alumni, 21 foster parents, and 2 child welfare professionals. The youth involved in this study emphasized the importance of young people taking part and having a say in the significant changes and decisions that impact their lives in care. Additionally, they expressed frustration that professionals and those involved in their lives often disregarded their input and opinions. For example, one foster adolescent expressed anger at caseworkers for

making plans without their input and then simply informing them after it has been done.

It is crucial for social workers, facilitators, and foster youth advocates to take into account the input and satisfaction of those participating in independent living programs. By listening and including foster youth, we can better identify certain aspects of service that needs improvement and barriers they face when they are emancipating from foster care. Ultimately, the goal is to improve these programs to better serve this disadvantaged population.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The key for foster adolescents transitioning to independent living successfully is through assistance and guidance, promotion of self-efficacy, and the ability to pull from their strengths and apply the life skills and experiences they have gained through the independent living programs. According to Guiterrez, Parsons, and Cox (as cited in Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Storm-Gottfried, & Larson, 2006), empowerment makes use of resources within the client system and actively encourages clients' participation in taking control of their lives. Foster

youth have the opportunity to take advantage and participate in all of the services offered by independent living programs. As they participate in the different services provided, they could begin to voice their opinions and provide feedback on what programs are effective and which ones need to be modified. The process of empowerment entails the full participation of clients in decision making, which will ultimately promote their ability to exercise control over their lives (Salzar & Staples as cited in Hepworth et al., 2006).

When facing a complex problem such as emancipating foster youth, persons on the outside such as social workers, case managers, etc. can at best make an educated assumption as to the barriers that must be overcome. Although the intentions are good, all aspects of the issue will never fully be understood. Without firsthand knowledge of such a task, as in the opinions and testimonials of foster youth who have both successfully and unsuccessfully made the transition to emancipation are included, we will never see the full scope of the problem.

It is possible for the caseworker, to unknowingly do a disservice to foster youth by taking on too much of the

responsibility versus allowing them to accomplish tasks on their own. Through explanation of why a particular life skill is important, youth are able to understand larger ramifications. When it becomes evident why something seemingly unimportant is in fact the opposite, youth will be able to take that step towards ownership and taking a vested interest in the task. Once young adults are able to clearly understand how essential a particular life skill is, they are able to become a stakeholder in their own lives and personal outcomes.

Summary

In summation, it is quite evident that foster youth experience much greater challenges than their peers who are not in foster care as they attempt to transition into independent living. Not only do they face greater challenges, but the vast majorities are forced to make such transition at a much earlier age. Studies have clearly identified that foster youth continue to struggle to attain higher education, employment, good health, and long lasting and consistent social support. Although there are a variety of independent living programs made available to foster youth, it appears that there is room

for revision and modification in such programs due to the continued difficulties for foster youth to successfully transition into independent living. Allowing foster youth to voice their perspective as to the quality of ILPs, produces the opportunity for such revision and modification.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will cover a detailed description of the research methods and procedures that were utilized in this study. More specifically, this chapter addresses the design of the study, sampling methods used, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis methods.

Study Design

In response to the high percentage of emancipated foster youth who are unable to successfully transition into independent living, this research study attempted to assess the satisfaction of foster youth with the Independent Living Programs (ILPs) in which they participate. Such programs have been established to equip foster youth with the ability to successfully transition into adulthood. Due to the aforementioned high percentage of foster youth who are unsuccessful with properly transitioning into adulthood, discovery of, if any, components of the ILPs foster youth are satisfied with may be useful in evaluating and or modifying the programs.

The research method that was utilized in this research study was a quantitative survey design. The research study used self-administered questionnaires. The participants were given a packet that included an informed consent form, survey questionnaire, and debriefing statement. The participants for the study were former foster care youth 18 years of age or older who are receiving ILP services. It was projected that at least 50 of the eligible participants would complete the questionnaire and would return it to the researchers.

A quantitative research design was chosen due to the limited amount of time available to conduct the study, and the low cost of using a survey questionnaire. This research design was also chosen because data can be collected from a much larger group of people. In addition, this design allowed for the participants to respond more freely without the pressure or influence of fellow participants if they were being asked to verbalize their satisfaction levels. Finally, this design was also chosen because the researchers' values and biases could not interfere with the interpretation of the data collected.

Aside from the strengths in using this research design, there were some limitations in utilizing it. Primarily, survey questionnaires have a low response rate. In order to attempt to offset that, the researchers attempted to obtain a large sample size of 50 participants. Another limitation was the possibility that participants would not respond honestly to the questions asked. Also, there was the possibility of questions being left unanswered or the markings for selecting an answer being unclear. Another limit to this design was that the researchers were unable to observe the participants for non-verbal responses to the questionnaire. Lastly, when using this design, the researchers were unable to provide clarification or assistance to the participants if it was needed in order to properly complete the questionnaire.

Sampling

Participants for this study were recruited from the Orangewood Children's Foundation (OCF), which is located in Santa Ana, California. OCF provides programs for current and emancipated foster youth. This study used convenience sampling. The participants were former foster care youth 18 years of age or older who are receiving ILP

services. For this study there were no gender or ethnicity restrictions. All the youth served at OCF met the criteria for participation of this study. The expected sample size for this study was approximately 50 participants. Thus, survey questionnaire was provided to 50 youth.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data collected for the study was obtained through self-administered questionnaires. The instrument used was compiled from a listing of available ILP services. In addition, three open-ended questions were also included. The open-ended questions allowed participants the opportunity to state which services they believed were most important, not important, and not being provided but needed for successful transition into adulthood. The data that was collected included demographic information such as age, gender, and ethnicity, and data that relates to foster youths' satisfaction levels of ILPs, and the youths outcomes on education, employment, housing, and social support. The information was measured with a standardized scale.

The dependent variable in the study was the satisfaction level of ILPs. The independent variables in the study were education, employment, housing, and social support. The independent and dependent variables were measured at a nominal level of measurement.

Procedures

In order to conduct the research, the initial step was to set up an appointment to meet with Mr. Mike McKenzie, Independent Living Program Supervisor for OCF. The appointment was be set up by the researchers. The purpose of the meeting was to present the study to Mr. McKenzie and seek his insight and approval of the study. A copy of the research proposal, informed consent, questionnaire, and debriefing statement were provided to Mr. McKenzie for review. Discussion regarding the number of potential participants also took place.

Once permission was granted to conduct the study, participants that fit the established criteria were selected from the OCF. The participants were selected from the two workshops that OCF holds on Wednesdays and Fridays of each week. The researchers, ILP supervisor, and life skills workshop coach agreed on two scheduled

dates when the surveys would be distributed to the youth. Each workshop has a total of twenty-five different students.

The questionnaires were administered before the beginning of the workshops on two different dates. During the first distribution, twenty-three youth chose to participate in the study. During the second distribution, twenty-two youth chose to participate in the study.

The participants were given a packet with various forms. The first form was the informed consent form (Appendix A) which was used to obtain participant consent. Participants were instructed to sign with an "X" mark to indicate their desire to voluntarily participate in the study. The second form in the packet was the survey questionnaire (Appendix B). The survey included several questions that took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Lastly, the third form was the debriefing statement that was provided for the participants to keep (Appendix C). Prior to distributing the packets, a brief explanation was given in regard to its contents as well as brief instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

Upon completion of the questionnaires, youth were presented with a five dollar gift card to Starbucks for their participation in the study. A total of forty-five questionnaires were collected by the researchers.

Protection of Human Subjects

All conceivable measures were taken in order to ensure the protection of rights and welfare of all participants. The participants were given a letter of introduction that outlines background information regarding the study, the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and benefits and risks to participating in the study. They were also given an informed consent form. Such forms explained that participation was voluntary, participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and participants had the right to leave questions unanswered if they so desired.

A debriefing statement was also given to the participants after the questionnaire was completed. The debriefing statement provided a contact number to reach the faculty advisor supervising the study and a statement of where and when the findings of the study would be made available. Lastly, all documents were kept confidential.

Upon receiving said documents, they were stored in a locked safe and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study in early June of 2009.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by quantitative data analysis method. Frequency distributions were used to describe demographic variables, educational achievement, employment and housing attainment, social support network, and the perceptions of satisfaction of the independent living programs among foster youth. Chi-square statistical tests were used in order to assess the associations between the independent variables and the dependent variables; education, employment, housing, social support, and perception of the satisfaction with independent living programs among foster youth. Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to assess relationships among variable of interest, as needed.

Summary

In summation, the research method utilized for the study was a quantitative survey design, using self-administered questionnaires. The participants for the study were recruited from the Orangewood Children's

Foundation located in Santa Ana, California. The sample was recruited from foster youth who were 18 years of age or older who are participating in ILP services. For this study there were no gender or ethnicity restrictions. The survey questionnaire was made up of demographic information, different sections pertaining to the many independent variables (education, employment, housing, and social support), the dependent variable (satisfaction of ILPS), and three open-ended questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter outlines the results of the quantitative research study performed in an attempt to discover which, if any, components of the ILPs, foster youth are satisfied with. The data was obtained through self administered questionnaires given to ILP participants from Orangewood Children's Foundation.

Presentation of the Findings

The participants chosen for this study were former foster care youth, 18 years of age or older, who are receiving ILP services. The number of youth who participated in the study totaled 45 participants. Of the 45 participants, 20 were female and 25 were male.

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 20.5 years old. The average age of the participants was 19 years of age.

There were six ethnicity categories provided for the youth to choose from. From such categories, three participants identified themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native, four as Asian, fifteen as Black or

African American, fourteen as Hispanic or Latino, one as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and eight as White or Caucasian (Figure 1).

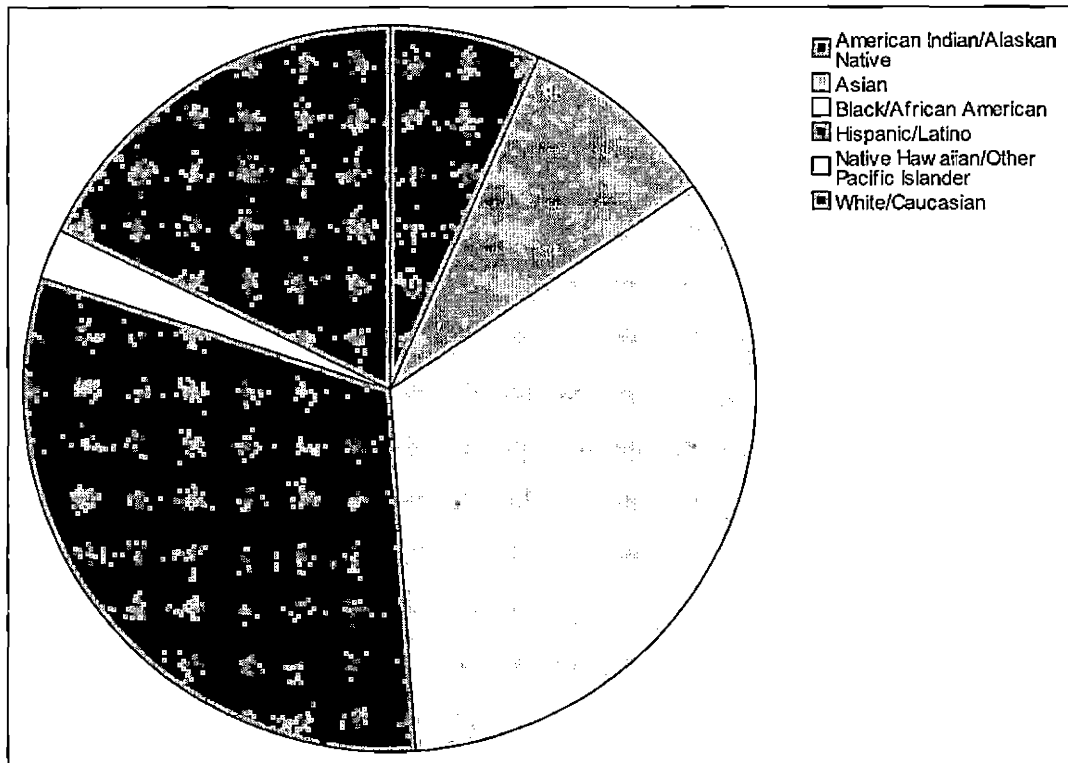


Figure 1. Ethnicity

Survey

The survey responses were analyzed utilizing quantitative procedures for nominal variables. Responses were conceptualized into two distinct categories; first, satisfaction with ILP services, and secondly, outcomes after participating in ILP services. For survey questions

relating to satisfaction with ILP services, responses were analyzed utilizing a Chi-Square test of Independence.

Significance levels were relatively insignificant in terms of comparing for gender, age and ethnicity, with the exception of one response. For the variable "gender", when looked at in regards to the variable measuring satisfaction with the mentoring experience in ILP, the p value was .030, indicating statistical significance (Figure 2).

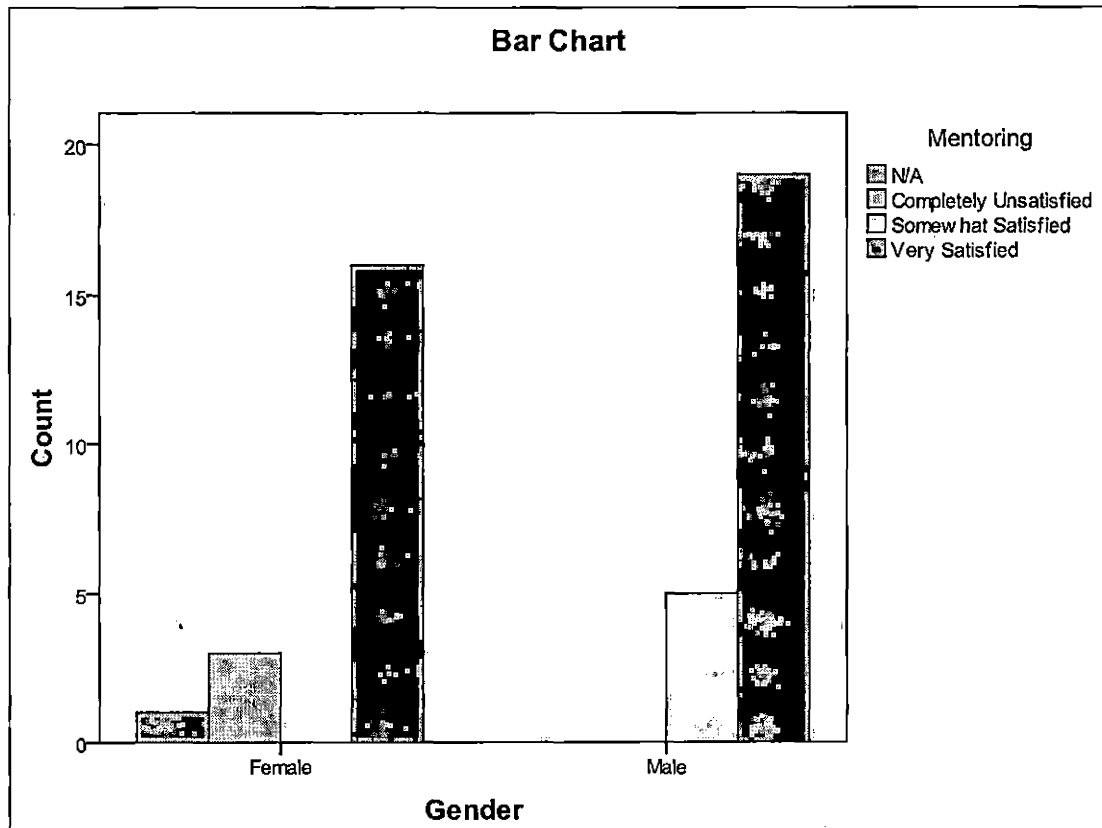


Figure 2. Gender

Similarly, when examining satisfaction with the mentoring aspect of the ILP services, in terms of its relationship to having adequate social support as an outcome of participating in ILP, there was statistical significance, with a p value of .001 (Figure 3).

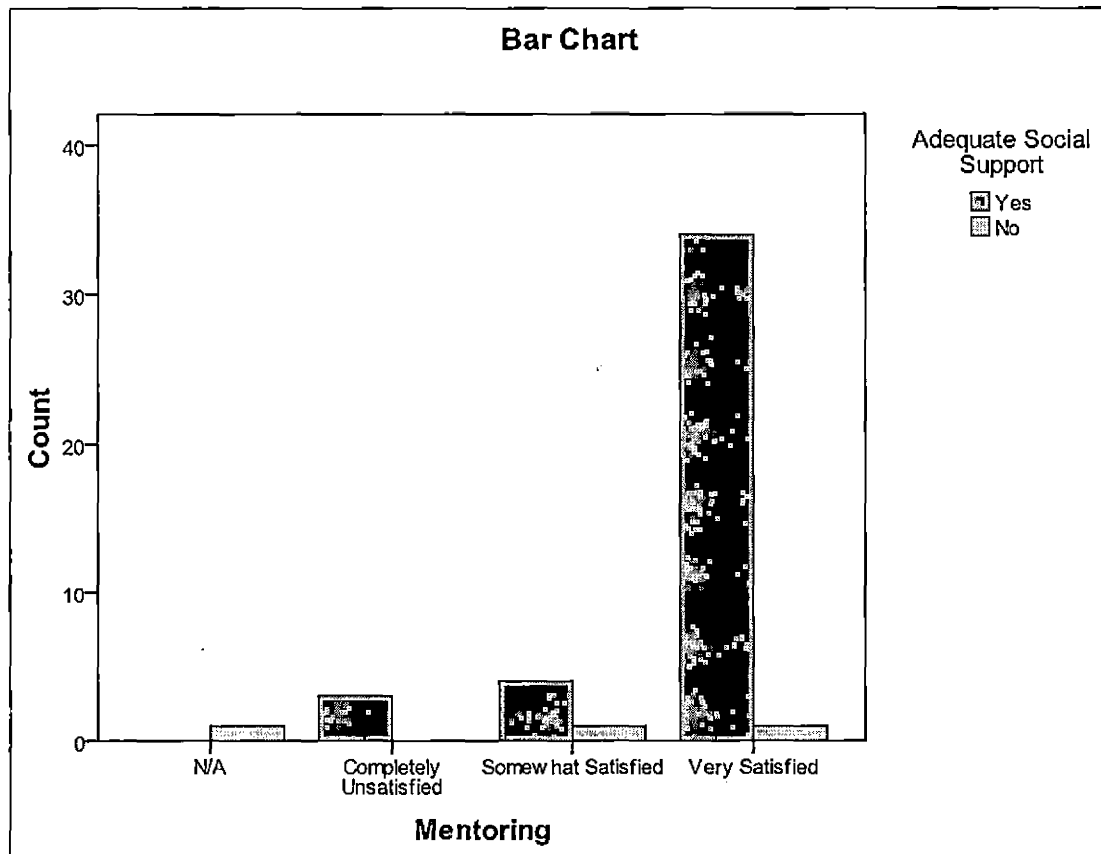


Figure 3. Mentoring

Another component of ILP services, the provision of social support, was related to the outcome measure, having adequate social support, as a result of participation in ILP, with a p value of .027 (Figure 4).

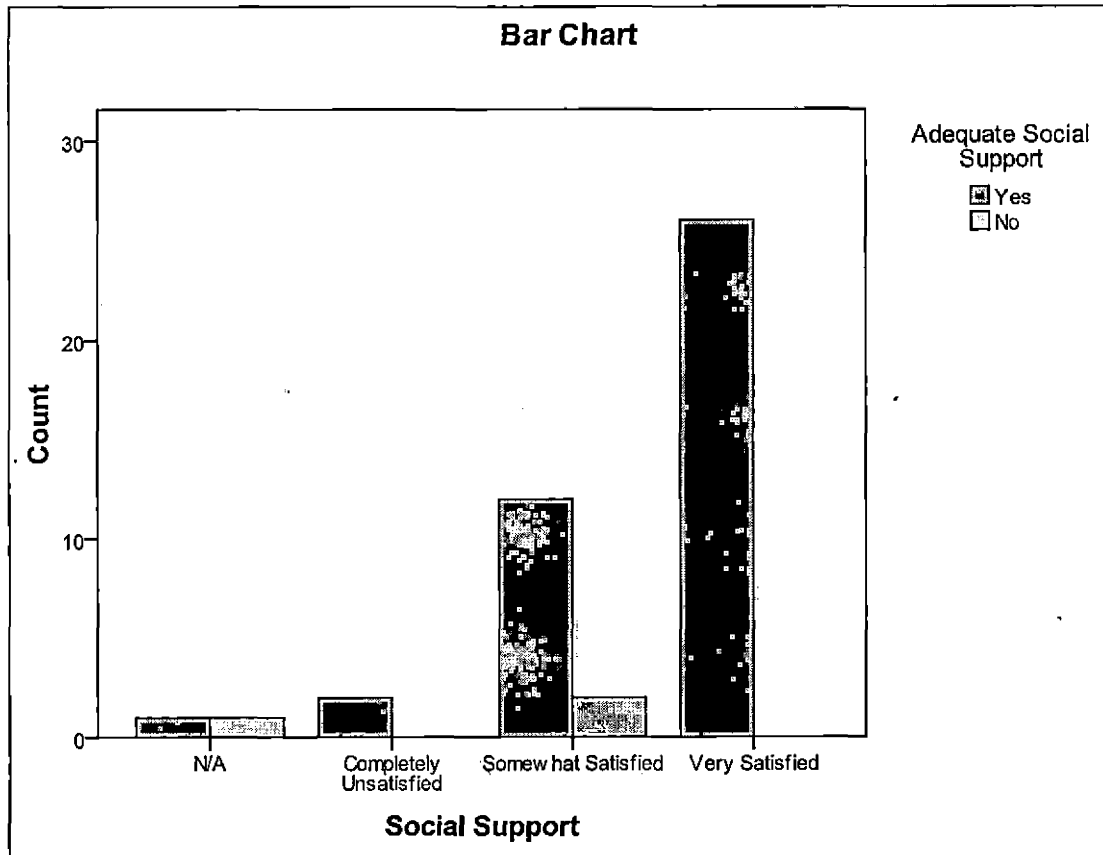


Figure 4. Social Support

The ILP component, housing assistance was also correlated with the outcome measure of having adequate social support, with a p value of .029 (Figure 5).

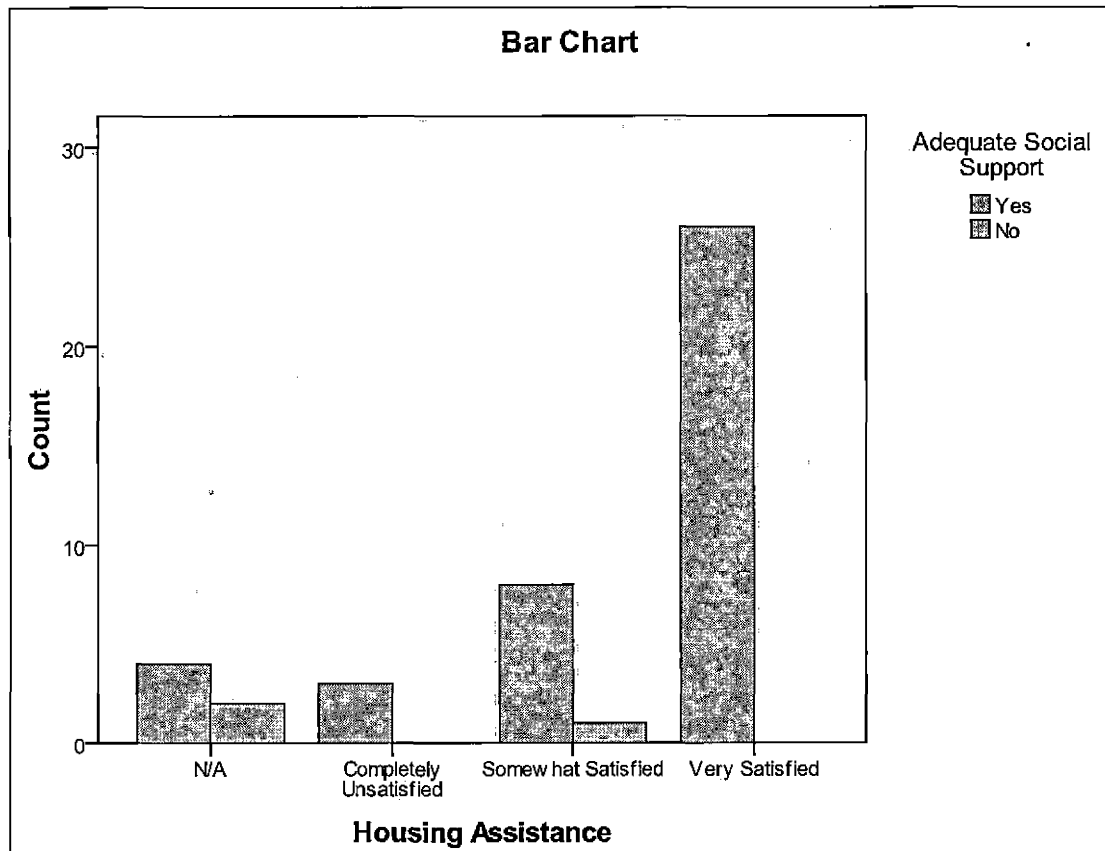


Figure 5. Housing Assistance

Also, the ILP component relating to higher education counseling was statistically significant in terms of its correlation to having adequate social support after participating in ILP services, with a p value of .000 (Figure 6).

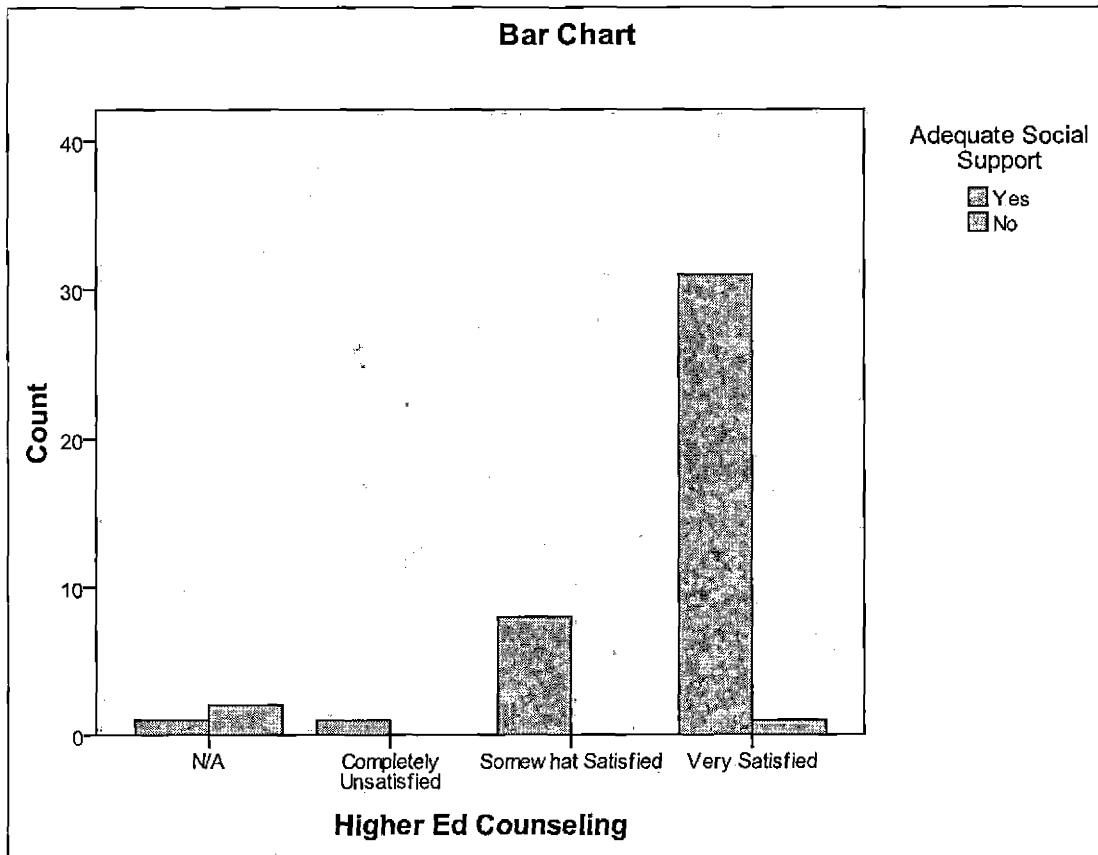


Figure 6. Higher Education Counseling

Similarly, satisfaction with the social skill development for independent living component of the ILP services was related to adequate social support after participation in ILP services, with a p value of .000 (Figure 7).

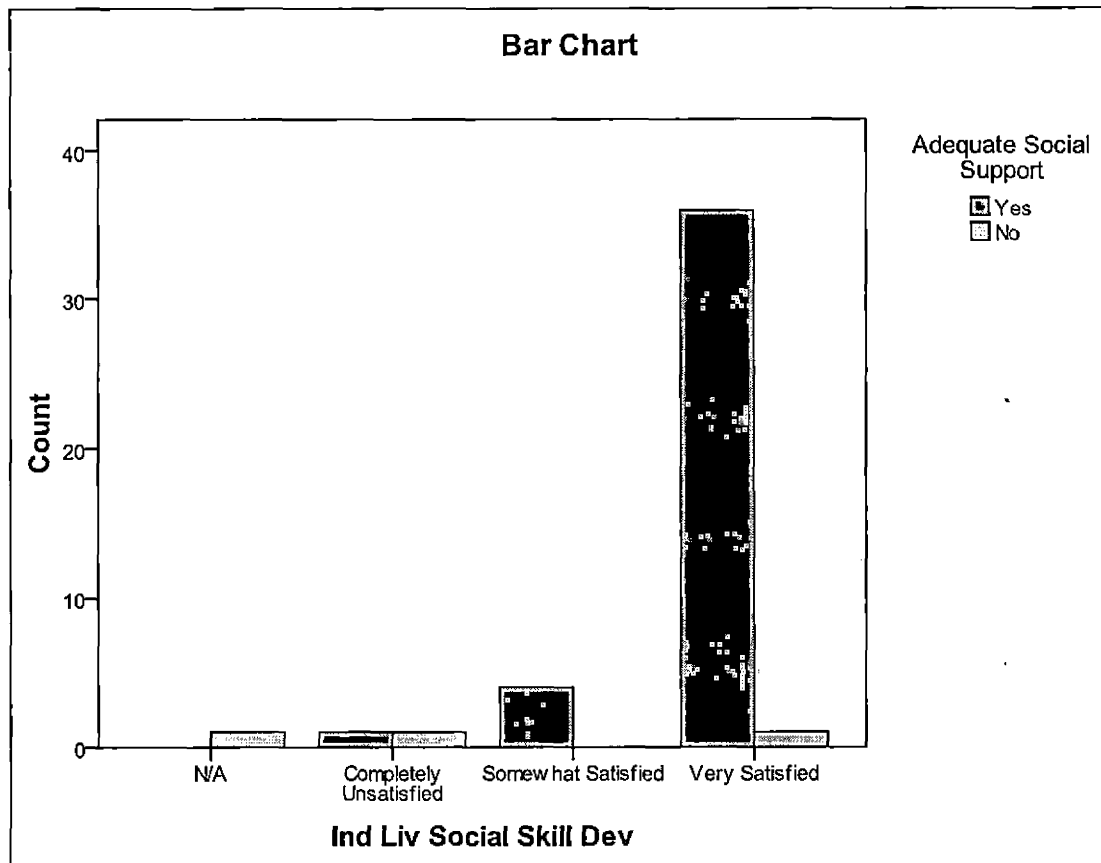


Figure 7. Independent Living Social Skill Dev

In addition, certain other important trends were discovered, without statistical significance. More than 80% of females and males both were very satisfied with the ILP components of Independent Living Social Skill Development and Financial Aid Information. This speaks to satisfaction levels in general with these aspects of the ILP services.

From the responses to the three open-ended questions, the service identified by 17.8% of respondents

as being very important for being able to successfully transition into adulthood was the ILP workshops. Of all the respondents, 46.7% felt that they could not identify a service that was not important to their ability to successfully transition into adulthood; therefore their response was "all services are important". The final open-ended question as to suggestions for additional services did not generate a response from 91.1% of the respondents.

Of those questionnaires that were returned, several of them had missing data. Out of the 45 participants, one youth checked off two responses for questions one through 13; therefore, the data gathered from that questionnaire had to be entered as missing.

The section of the questionnaire that consisted of three open ended questions was where the majority of responses were not provided by the youth. The question in which the youth were asked which service they did not feel was at all important for successful transition into independent living, resulted with 14 youth not responding.

Summary

This chapter described participant demographics, as well as the study's significant findings. Several significant relationships were revealed, and important trends were identified. Several ILP components were identified as significantly related to outcomes after participating in ILP. The most significantly impacted outcome variable was that of having adequate social support.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter offers an explanation for the findings made from the research study. It will also identify and explain the limitations of the study. Lastly, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research will be provided.

Discussion

The aspiration of the researchers was to gather data indicating which components of ILPs foster youth are satisfied with, to explore if their satisfaction levels with such components correlated with the outcomes of education, employment, housing, and social support, and to gather their suggestions for important, not important, and needed services so that such data may assist in evaluating and/or making improvements to ILPs.

The most significant finding of this study was the difference in how females and males perceived the ILP component of mentoring. Females were significantly less satisfied with the mentoring experience they had in ILP. This is a finding worth further exploration. Clearly,

there is a difference in gender needs with regard to mentoring. It will be important to identify such differences in order for females to have a more satisfying experience with mentoring as a component of IPL services.

Other statistically significant findings were the relationships between satisfaction with the ILP components of mentoring, social support, housing assistance, counseling about higher education, and social skill development for independent living, and participants' perception of having adequate social support after participation.

Such findings, as pertaining to the components of mentoring and social support, can be applied to the results from the study conducted by the California Permanency for Youth Project (2004), which found that permanency was difficult for foster youth to achieve if they do not have people who can be a source of permanent connection in their lives. Also, Reilly (2003) found that although the majority of youth in the foster care system were exposed to support services, only very minimal reported to having received such services after emancipation.

The relationship between such findings can attest that, due to components in which foster youth were given the opportunity to develop connections and the skills to do so, they are able to have adequate social support on their own. This should be taken into great consideration in regard to the provision of ILPs for foster youth.

With regard specifically to the mentoring component, those more satisfied with mentoring tended to have stronger perceptions of having adequate social support. It is possible that the mentoring experience allowed participants to understand the importance of social support as part of their successful transition into independent living. The provision of mentoring may have also provided the education and encouragement for foster youth to be proactive in their pursuit of social support. Similarly, there was also a relationship between the ILP component of social support and participants' perception of having adequate social support after participation.

Clearly, social support is a vital component to effective ILP services, which leads to a variety of positive outcomes, including but not limited to the ability for foster youth to create a social support network for themselves.

Although not statistically significant, there were certain trends that revealed themselves within the data. For instance, over 80% of respondents, both male and female, were very satisfied with the ILP components of Independent Living Social Skill Development and Financial Aid Information. This speaks to the fact that there is a continuing need for and benefit in participating in such components of ILP services.

The findings of the study indicated that there was an overall high level of satisfaction with the components of the ILP by the youth. Although there was an overall high level of satisfaction with the components of the ILP by the youth, there were variations as to which components each individual youth was very satisfied with. Due to such variations, it is important that the implementation of ILP services be based on the individual needs and desires of the youth. These findings certainly corroborate with the findings of Greene and Powers (2007) in which they indicated that the youth in their study voiced the importance of being included by professionals in decisions made for their lives, supports the findings of this current study.

Three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. They were included as a means to have the respondents identify which ILP services they felt were most important in supporting their successful transition into adulthood. Also, they were asked to identify which services they deemed as being not important at all, and also any services not offered, but perceived as being needed.

Overall, the youth attested to the fact that all ILP services are needed in order to successfully transition into adulthood. It is evident that the ILP workshops provided for the youth are having a positive impact on them, as they identify that service as very important.

Limitations

There were several limitations identified in this research study, one of which was that the sample size was not large enough for the results to be generalizable. Although the goal of the researchers was to obtain a sample size of 50 participants, only 45 youth chose to complete the questionnaire. Also, the sample was gathered from only one agency in the county of Orange. As such, various foster youth and their experience with other ILP

providers were excluded from providing their satisfaction levels with ILP.

Another limitation identified was that although 45 questionnaires were returned to the researchers, not all of them were fully completed. Some participants either didn't provide a response or provided multiple responses.

Similarly, none of the 45 youth surveyed responded to the open-ended question in which they were asked to identify any services not already being provided that would help them transition into independent living.

The aforementioned problems encountered with the study can be attributed to general limitations of using questionnaires for research. Self-administered questionnaires do not provide researchers with the ability to clarify any confusion for the participants, to encourage participants to answer all questions, or to ensure that responses are marked correctly.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Based on the findings of the research study, there are some recommendations that can be provided for social work practice. First, it would be beneficial for social workers to ensure that foster youth are receiving ILP

services that are tailored to each individual youth. Although there was an overall high level of satisfaction with the components of the ILP by the youth, there were variations as to which components each individual youth was very satisfied with.

Also, social workers should ensure that all foster youth are presented with an explanation of available services to them along with the opportunity to receive them. The aforementioned recommendation is made based on the result of some of the not applicable responses being explained as: "not offered or don't know what that service is".

Also, based on the most significant finding, that females are significantly less satisfied with the mentoring component of ILPs, further research needs to be done to uncover why females are less satisfied. It is evident that there exists a difference in gender needs, and such exploration may result in higher levels of satisfaction with mentoring services among females.

It is recommended that in order to build upon this research a more in depth study of foster youth satisfaction with ILP services and related outcomes be conducted to more fully explore the topic in general.

Further, a specific inquiry, through the means of focus groups, into the topic of gender differences and mentorship satisfaction should be conducted in order for females to receive a more meaningful experience in ILP.

Of the data gathered from the questionnaires, four youth expressed four different new ideas for ILP service components. Those ideas are as follows: connect youth with the community, provide an emancipation coach for foster youth up to six months after they have emancipated, provide youth with independent housing, and give youth medical evaluations.

Conclusions

This research study looked at former foster youth's satisfaction with ILP services within the Orangewood Children's Foundation. Self administered surveys were provided to the participants. There were 45 questionnaires returned to the researchers for examination. Significant findings included gender differences in levels of satisfaction with mentoring services. Overall, youth were very satisfied with their ILP services. Further qualitative studies are needed to

more thoroughly investigate areas of need for this population.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to assess the satisfaction level of Independent Living Programs (ILPs) among foster care youth. This study is being conducted by Nadia Fuentes and Monica Sapien under the supervision of Faculty Laurel E. Brown, Dept. of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Dept. of the Social Work Sub-committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to respond to several questions pertaining to your satisfaction level with ILPs. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be reported with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion after September, 2009 at the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the questionnaire, you will receive a debriefing statement. Possible benefits from participating in the study include but are not limited to the evaluation and or modification of ILPs in order to better fit foster youth needs. In addition, as a token of appreciation, all participants will receive a \$5.00 Starbucks gift card. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a result of participating in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact us or Ms. Laurel E. Brown at (909) 537-3838.

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 B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

Please provide the following information.

Age _____ Gender _____

Ethnicity:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaskan Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American | <input type="checkbox"/> White or Caucasian |

For each service available through ILP, please mark ☐ with an X to indicate which statement best describes your level of satisfaction. If you choose N/A (not applicable), please provide a reason (i.e. service not offered, service declined).

Needs assessment

- ☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied
☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Mentoring

- ☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied
☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Academic counseling

- ☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied
☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Preparation for GED

- ☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied
☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Tutoring

- ☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied
☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Social Support

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Housing assistance

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Job preparation

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Test preparation (i.e. SAT)

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Counseling about higher education

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Info about financial aid/scholarships

Help completing college applications/loans

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Tutoring while in college

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

Social skill development for independent living

☐ Completely unsatisfied ☐ somewhat satisfied ☐ very satisfied

☐ N/A (provide reason) _____

For the following questions, please mark ☐ with an X to indicate either yes or no.

Have you received a high school diploma or GED?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you enrolled in a trade school, college, or university?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you currently employed?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have a permanent living arrangement?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you feel you have adequate social support?

☐ Yes ☐ No

For the following questions, please provide your input.

Which service do you feel is the most important for you to successfully transition into independent living and why?

Which service do you feel is not at all important for you to successfully transition into independent living and why?

Are there any services not already being provided that you feel would help you to successfully transition into independent living and why?

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed was designed to assess the satisfaction level of Independent Living Programs (ILPs) among foster care youth. We are interested in discovering what, if any, components of the ILPs foster youth are satisfied with, as such components may be useful in evaluating and or modifying the programs to better fit the needs of foster youth.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other participants. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, please feel free to contact Professor Laurel E. Brown at (909) 537-3838.

If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino or Orangewood Children's Foundation after September, 2009.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

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

1. Data Collection:

Assigned Leader: Monica Sapien

Assisted By: Nadia Fuentes

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Assigned Leader: Nadia Fuentes

Assisted By: Monica Sapien

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Nadia Fuentes & Monica Sapien

b. Methods

Team Effort: Nadia Fuentes & Monica Sapien

c. Results

Team Effort: Nadia Fuentes & Monica Sapien

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Nadia Fuentes & Monica Sapien