Emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers

Joni Renee Dominguez
Lakesha Lavone Spivey

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EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTHS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR SOCIAL WORKERS

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
Joni Renee Dominguez
Lakesha Lavone Spivey
June 2012
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers while in the foster care system. Previous research indicated that foster youths needed stability, collaboration, relational support, empathy, assistance to resources and a desire to be heard in order to build better relationships with their social workers. It has been well documented that having a positive relationship with their social worker enabled the foster youth to have a higher rate of success.

This study used a qualitative design, conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews with ten emancipated foster youths. The interviews were conducted with an interview guide, and convenience sampling was used. The study found that foster youths had mixed experiences with social workers. The results of the study revealed some common themes that emerged regarding what foster youth wanted from their social workers. The themes that emerged were: compassion, caring, responsiveness, helpfulness, communication and being treated like an individual. The results of this study can be used to provide insight and guidance into improving the relationship between foster
youth and social worker. This study suggested that a policy practice of requiring the social workers to show a foster youth their case plan and discussing it with the youth should be implemented within the Department of Children and Family Services. This study also suggested implementing a minimum amount of time for face-to-face contacts between the social worker and the foster youth. It is recommended that the Department of Children and Family Services hire more social workers to lower the caseloads, increasing the amount of time each worker can spend with the foster youths.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the emancipated foster youths who participated in this research study. Without their willingness to disclose their personal information, this research study would not be what it is. We would like to acknowledge Jamie Cooks at Aspiranet in San Bernardino, for allowing us to interview the emancipated foster youth from the organization. And Sally Richter from San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services, for supporting our research topic and defending us when needed. And finally, we would also like to acknowledge Dr. Janet Chang for her support and guidance throughout the completion of this project.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my family and friends. To my wonderful parents and siblings, for all of their love and support throughout this journey. Thank you all for believing in me and pushing me to accomplish this goal. To my wonderful friend and research partner, Lakesha Spivey, thank you for allowing me to join you on this journey. I could not have finished without you! I would also like to dedicate this to Scott, for his constant encouragement, support and laughter throughout the past two years. Thank you for being there for me when I needed it the most.

Joni Dominguez

I would like to dedicate this project to my family. To my husband, Chrysanthus Thomas, thank you for being an amazing man and changing my world. You gave me so much joy throughout this year. To my mom, Brenda Carr, thank you for teaching me how to be a woman, supporting me and giving me life. I could not have done it without you. To my brother, Henry Robinson, thank you for helping out with childcare during this journey. You are so kind hearted. To my handsome son, Darius Moore, thank you for being so patient and independent during the many moments when I had to study. To my friend and research partner, Joni Dominguez,
you are truly a blessing and you made this project seem so much easier than it really was. I love and appreciate each and every one of you dearly.

Lakesha Spivey

We would like to dedicate this project to all the foster youth in the child welfare system, who just want the support and empathy of their social worker. We would also like to dedicate this project to future social workers planning on working within the Department of Children and Family Services. We hope that the results of this study can help you become better social workers for foster youths.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Context</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Context</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Project for Social Work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Youths' Experiences with Social Workers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of Foster Youth and Solutions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems and Suggestions for Social Workers from Foster Youth</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories Guiding Conceptualization</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: METHODS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Design</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Instruments</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the proposed research study, presenting the need to understand emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. This chapter includes a brief overview of the importance of understanding social worker and foster youth relationships. In this section, policies and practices involved with foster youth and their future are discussed. Additionally, this chapter will present the purpose of the study and the significance that the study will have on social work practice.

Problem Statement

Social workers within the child welfare system have the goal of providing safety, permanency and well-being of a child. In order to accomplish this goal, social workers need to work with the foster youth and collaborate together in order to provide the best services for the youth. Social workers are obligated to provide these foster youths with resources and encouragement during their journey through
the foster care system. A social worker needs to see the foster youth often and should have a good understanding of who the youth is and what they want for themselves. Social workers and foster youth need to work together and have a relationship that consists of more than just worker and client. However, due to the high volume of children in the foster care system and the low number of social workers, both parties may not be able to work together as much as one would hope. Social workers may be spending less time building rapport with the foster youth and are not able to give each foster youth the attention that they need and deserve. The lack of quality time social workers have to offer foster youth may result in negative perceptions of the relationship that they share with their social workers.

The quality of care given to foster youth by social workers is very important for a foster youth's future. It may be among many determining factors that help guide youth to have more positive outcomes after emancipation from the foster care system. Social workers may become mentors for the foster youths, helping the youths build on their strengths, self-esteem, trust and confidence. As stated by McLeod (2010), “having a positive and sustained personal relationship with their social worker promotes a foster
youth's well-being" (p. 772). Having a good quality relationship gives the foster youths more chances to grow and develop in a positive direction. This study will seek to address emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers during the youths’ stay in the foster care system. This study will assess if the foster youths were engaged or empowered, and whether they felt that their social workers had a genuine concern for them. We will focus on emancipated foster youths’ opinions and experiences with their social workers; specifically, we will assess how they felt they were treated by their social workers and whether or not their social workers were successful in supporting the youth when needed. We want to understand the dynamic between social worker and foster youth, and how this may affect the youth’s future.

Policy Context

In 1998, California enacted Senate Bill 1901, which established the Kinship-Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP), allowing foster youth to exit the child welfare system to stable and permanent relative guardianships as cited in Beall (2009, p.1). This allows for many foster youths to have a stable placement once they are old enough
to leave the system. Each year about 4,000 to 5,000 of California’s young people emancipate, leaving them without funding or support systems in order to survive on their own. As a result, according to Beall (2009), former foster youths are far more likely than other youth to experience homelessness, unemployment, unplanned pregnancy and involvement with the legal system. Ten years later, in 2008, the United States Congress enacted HR 6893, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. This act allows for states to receive funding for foster care, kinship-guardianship and adoption assistance to youth until the age of twenty-one.

In California, HR 6893 has been represented as Assembly Bill 12. Assembly Bill 12, California Fostering Connections to Success Act, was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on September 30, 2010. AB 12 will re-enact the existing Kin-GAP program to align with federal requirements, extend foster care eligibility beyond age eighteen until age twenty-one, provide Kin-GAP assistance until age twenty-one and provide extended assistance for certain populations until age twenty-one. The first part of this bill, aligning Kin-GAP to federal standards began January 1, 2011. The rest of this bill will be enacted in
phases over three years, beginning January 1, 2012 (Beall et al., 2010). With the enactment of this bill, thousands of foster youth will be able to receive funding and services from the child welfare system as they adjust to their new lifestyles and adulthood. Through collaborative relationships, social workers will be able to aid foster youth in understanding how they can benefit from continued services after the age of 18.

**Practice Context**

Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve processes (Wright, 2007). This study will allow social workers to see if their application of these principles and techniques is working in a positive manner for their clients. From this study, social work professionals will be able to understand what they could do better within their field of practice; it will also give them the ability to understand their client's perceptions and experiences.
This study focuses on emancipated foster youth and their experiences with social workers. It will allow social workers to see what the foster youth actually want and/or appreciate from their social worker. Social service agencies dealing with foster youth will be able to use the findings of this study to change their policies and practices within their agency. Child welfare agencies, such as the Department of Children and Family Services, will take interest in this study due to its relevance to social workers and clients who are involved with the agency. This study gives child welfare workers new insight into how they work with their clients in the child welfare system. Workers will be able to see their relationships with their clients and may be able to change their behavior and interactions for the better. By learning from the experiences of former foster youth, social workers will be able to improve their practices and behaviors to create a more positive relationship with their future foster youth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers while in the foster care system. This
study focused on the types of relationships that emancipated foster youth had with their social workers while in the foster care system. The relationship between social worker and foster youth can greatly affect the foster youth's future outcomes. Having the ability to listen to former foster youth and hear what they feel is important of a social worker. This study will change the way child welfare workers will conduct their practice. This study gives social work practitioners the ability to see what needs to be changed within the worker-client relationship in child welfare.

This study employed a qualitative study design, consisting of face to face interviews with ten emancipated foster youth. The emancipated foster youth were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Conducting a qualitative study allowed the researchers to gain a full understanding of the emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their social worker. These interviews consisted of twenty questions, covering a range of topics such as bonding, trust, communication/contact, satisfaction and dislikes. By using a qualitative research design, it allowed the researchers to get honest answers about the emancipated youths’ experience in child welfare. Data from qualitative
research designs is often influenced by the research participants and their own experiences (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). Because we wanted to focus on the emancipated foster youths' personal experiences and relationships with their social workers, conducting interviews allowed for more natural responses. This also allowed the researchers to ask more questions to the research participants if more clarification was needed.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The results of this study will affect social work practice, policy and research. By questioning emancipated foster youths, we were able to see exactly how they felt during their time in the child welfare system. This study offers an understanding of the needs of foster youth and helps define the dynamics of the worker-client relationship. The findings of this study could benefit social work practice, specifically the practice for child welfare social workers. By using the results of the study, child welfare workers would be able to provide better services to the foster youth they encounter. Workers will use this information to create better relationships and change their practices within child welfare.
The generalist practice model allows practitioners to view problems holistically and plan interventions aimed at different clients (Hepworth, Rooney, Dewberry-Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen, 2010, p. 23). The generalist practice model consists of seven different stages: engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination and follow-up. The findings of this study will affect the first stage of the generalist practice model dramatically. Using the results of this study, child welfare workers will be able to engage their clients in a more positive manner, and will be able to form a positive relationship from the beginning. By forming a strong bond in the engagement stage, it will allow child welfare workers to work with the youth in an easier manner through the rest of the six stages of the practice model. The results of this study impact the engagement stage, which in turn, impacts the rest of the stages, allowing for a more positive relationship between the social worker and the foster youth.

This study may also impact policy changes throughout the field of social work. By learning from the experiences of former foster youth, social service agencies will be able to improve their agency policies. The results from
This study may impact (or formulate) future legislation, such as Assembly Bill 12. This study can help increase legislation and policies that impact the child welfare system. Additionally, the findings of this study will continue to add to the social work research that is already available on the relationship between social workers and emancipated foster youth. This study will help explain what foster youth appreciate and want from their social worker, and define what makes a positive worker-client relationship.

This study focused on emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. The primary research question for this study is: What are emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers?
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, a careful analysis of the current literature on emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers will be presented. In particular, this chapter will review the emancipated foster youths’ experiences, opinions and evaluations of the relationships they shared with their social worker while in foster care. Furthermore, this chapter will examine Social Capital and Attachment Theory as it relates to foster youth and social workers. These theories will be used to guide conceptualization in this study.

Foster Youths’ Experiences with Social Workers

A review of the literature showed that a recent focus has been given to emancipating foster youth and the foster care system indicating that approximately 20,000 youth exit foster care around the majority age of 18 years old (Geenen & Powers, 2007).
Geenen and Powers (2007) conducted a qualitative study on the foster care experiences of 27 participants and found that foster youth wanted caring and long term relationships with someone as they transition through the foster care system. Several qualitative themes emerged with respect to the participants in this study such as the importance of relationships, importance of self determination and collaboration, importance of family, and importance of Independent Living Program services. They also indicated that foster youth felt important when they were provided with information pertaining to their cases and options for life after emancipation.

In a qualitative study conducted by Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs, and Ross (2010), twenty children who had been in foster care for 6 to 36 months were interviewed. These children ranged from 8 to 15 years of age during the time of participation. Five main themes emerged from this study regarding foster youths’ needs during their transition through foster care. They found that foster youths wanted their social workers to meet their basic needs, spend time building the shared relationship, allow foster youths to be an active participant in decision making, provide them with timely notices when they were to
be moved, notify them of placement changes and have compassion and support for them.

Collins, Spencer, and Ward (2010) surveyed 96 former foster youth, who had aged out of the foster care system, and focused on supports they received throughout their transition from foster care. They addressed the types of relationships, characteristics of relationships and the relationships to social support outcomes of foster youth. The study found that foster youth received the most social support from their birth families, mentors, and child welfare professionals. They examined the characteristics of social workers, who often became mentors to the youth, and found that the length of the relationship, duration of contacts and amount of encouragement was supportive in the youth’s transition. It was shown that foster youth, who had a supportive relationship, were more likely to complete high school, decrease the possibility of homelessness and have positive outcomes.

Needs of Foster Youth and Solutions

An exploration of the literature illustrates that a great amount of research is focused on the needs of foster youth. Barth (1990) conducted a qualitative study of 55
foster youths who were at least 16 years of age at the time of emancipation and found that more than half the youths left foster care without a high school diploma, needed life skills preparation and access to health care. Foster youths reported significant academic, physical or social troubles during their later years in placement due to a lack of support. The study also found that foster youth sought employment after emancipation to reduce financial hardship, wanted continued relationships with their families and professionals they met while in care and preferred to have had emancipation planning.

Rogers (2011) in a qualitative study examined five emancipated foster youth who had entered care from the ages of 6 to 18. The results indicated that foster youth wanted to have a less abrupt transition out of the foster care system, wanted to feel cared for, wanted to sustain emotional support with foster parents and social workers after emancipation, wanted to be supported unconditionally and have the security of being able to return to their family placement home if they became unable to support themselves after emancipation.

Results of this study is useful in identifying the need for foster youth to have access to AB 12, which is
long term foster care that allows youth to remain in the foster care system after the age of 18. This study corroborates the reasons why long term foster care is vital to continue to meet the needs of foster youth after emancipation.

Another study examined 43 high risk adolescents qualitatively about their relationships with caregivers and social workers while in foster care (Unger, 2004). Results showed that adolescents preferred more reliable placements with caregivers who will allow them to have an identity while cultivating their well being and control over the choices being made about them. They wanted social workers to help them with structuring their worlds, to help make task accomplishments easier and achievable, and desired to have a relationship that resembled a parent and child relationship with their social workers.

Problems and Suggestions for Social Workers from Foster Youth

Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar and Trinkle (2010) conducted interviews with 25 foster youths through focus groups. They identified three themes that emerged from this study, regarding social worker turnover, which consisted of a lack of stability, loss of trust, and second chances. Eighteen
of the youths had a negative perception of losing a social worker; however, three youths indicated that getting a new social worker was a positive experience that presented an opportunity for a second chance with a new more committed social worker. Results indicated that foster youth suggested that social workers be paid a higher wage to decrease social worker turnover, lower their caseloads, be committed to the youth and be respectful. Furthermore, participants suggested that social workers make transitioning to a new worker as smooth as possible by allowing the youth time to adjust to the new social worker.

Yen, Hammond and Kushel (2009) interviewed and surveyed 31 former foster youths, ages 18-24, about their housing circumstances, housing expenses, medical information, and access to medications. Five key themes were identified, such as the impact that housing circumstances had on the foster youth’s access to health care, how housing issues hindered communication of information between social workers and foster youths, how housing problems differed between male and female, how housing agency regulations and structure were insufficient in meeting the individual needs of foster youth and how emancipated youth often experienced the consequences of
long term foster care which caused distrust of authority and medical providers.

In a qualitative study of Morris (2007), the problems facing youth as they age out of foster care were examined. The study consisted of ten unstructured and structured interviews with 16 emancipated foster youth between the ages of 18 to 25 and who were, at the time of the interviews, currently living independently. Five major themes emerged with regards to the youths' feelings about what lead them into foster care, having no stable place to call their home due to placement changes, broken promises from their social workers, being failed by the system, and offered ideas for change. The study found that youth suggested ways to improve the foster care system by hiring social workers who have more experience and understanding of foster youth, offering continuing educational programs, being provided with introduction to real life experiences such as cooking, washing clothes, or opening a bank account. Moreover, foster youth suggested having their emotional needs addressed, having access to health education in the area of substance abuse, having improved living conditions and being provided with a mentor prior to emancipation.
Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Social capital theory was used to guide this research study and to understand the vitality of relationships between social workers and foster youth. The central tenets of social capital theory includes exchanges, trust, obligation, bonding, bridging and issues concerning the marginalization of certain groups (Laser & Leibowitz, 2009). Social workers and foster youth will share relationships that will require continuous exchanging of information, trust between one another, mutual obligation and bonding to enhance a mentoring relationship. Social Capital Theory links an individual’s ability to acquire resources through the connection of social networks, and other social commodities, to positive outcomes (Laser & Leibowitz, 2009). This theory would be useful for understanding the promotion of trust, obligation and bonding in the relationships between social workers and foster youth.

Attachment theory was also used to guide this study because this theory can be defined in the concept of a secure base from which youth can venture out, knowing that, on their return, they will be welcomed, nurtured and soothed (Bolen, 2000). Being able to form an attachment is
a great challenge for many children in the foster care system. Most of the youth within the system experienced disruptive attachment to their caregivers at a young age. When youth cannot attach to their caregivers, the relationships that they have later in life are impacted often causing difficulty with bonding and trusting (Bolen, 2000). By not being able to attach to their caregivers, it impacts every relationship they have thereafter (Bolen, 2000). Attachment theory can be used to explain why many foster youths are not able to bond with their social workers. When foster youth are able to form an attachment to their caregivers, the youth is more likely to bond with their social workers while also recognizing that their social worker is there to assist, guide, support, and nurture them.

Summary

An overview of literature concerning foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers, as it relates to their experience, was presented here. For this study, the areas of focus were the experiences of foster youths with social workers, needs of foster youth and solutions, along with problems and
suggestions for social workers from foster youth. Much of the literature suggests that foster youths need stability, collaboration, relational support, empathy, assistance to resources and desire to be heard in order to build better perceptions about the relationships they share with their social workers. This review also covered social capital theory and attachment theory as guiding conceptualizations for this study. There is a lack of qualitative research regarding foster youths' experiences with their social workers; therefore, further studies would be useful.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study used a qualitative design method to examine emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. This chapter will describe the study's design, sampling technique, data collection procedure, interview instruments, protection of human subjects and qualitative data analysis.

Study Design

The specific purpose of this study was to examine emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. This study used a qualitative design for collecting data. Face to face interviews with ten emancipated foster youths, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, were conducted by the researchers. By conducting a qualitative study, the researchers were able to gain a full understanding of the emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their social worker. The interviews consisted of twenty-five questions, covering a range of topics including foster youths' experience with social workers, their views on social
worker's attitudes and services, social worker's contribution, emancipation, strengths/weaknesses of social worker and demographics. A quantitative design would limit the participant's responses, whereas this design allowed for more honest and natural responses. However, with the sample size being held at a maximum of ten participants, this study is not necessarily representative of all foster youths who have emancipated from the system.

This study focused on emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. Therefore, the research question for this study was: What are emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers?

Sampling

This study used convenience sampling to recruit ten emancipated foster youths. Participants (emancipated foster youths) were identified and recruited by Aftercare Programs, within the Department of Children and Family Services. Fliers from the researchers asking the emancipated youth to participate in the study were sent out to all of the youths involved in the Aftercare Programs. If interested, the youths were to contact the researchers, who
then used convenience sampling in order to identify ten participants for this study. Aspiranet, an Aftercare Program, enabled the researchers to attend a workshop they were holding, in which twenty-five to thirty emancipated foster youths were attending. During the workshop, the researchers were able to introduce themselves and the study, and pass out their recruitment letters to the emancipated foster youths. The emancipated youths were then able to interview with the researchers at the end of the workshop. Researchers were able to recruit and interview ten emancipated foster youths that same day.

Sampling criteria, for the purpose of this study, included only foster youth who had been emancipated from San Bernardino County's foster care system and who were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. It was critical to keep the age of the participants low because this meant the participant was just recently emancipated. Therefore, their memories about their experiences within the foster care system would still be relevant and easy to recall.
Data Collection and Instruments

This study conducted face to face interviews using an interview guide comprised of approximately twenty questions, not counting demographic questions (see Appendix A). Participants were asked of their experience with their social worker, their social worker’s attitude and services, their social worker’s contribution, emancipation and strengths/weaknesses of their social worker. Demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, the length of time in foster care and the number of placements while in foster care were gathered at the beginning of the interview.

The sequence of the questions was constructed to encourage the participant to state more as the interview continued. For instance, the first section included questions such as: “How many social workers did you have?” and “Did your social worker see you in a timely manner?” As the interview continued, the questions shifted from basic information, to more open-ended questions where the participant was allowed to say more. Some example questions are, “Did you feel that your social worker was concerned about you and your well-being?” and “What advice would you give to your social worker if you could speak to him/her?”
These open-ended interview questions allowed for the participant to express their personal opinion and feelings about their experiences without limiting their responses.

Procedures

Permission for this study was acquired from the Institutional Review Board in December 2011. Permission was also obtained from San Bernardino County Children and Family Services in November 2011. Participants were recruited from the Aftercare Programs within the Department of Children and Family Services. The researchers sent out fliers to employees and emancipated foster youths involved with the Aftercare Programs (see Appendix B). These fliers described the study, the length of the interview and the incentive that would be given to participants ($5.00 gift cards). If interested, the youths were asked to contact the researchers, who then selected ten participants for this study.

The researchers contacted Aspiranet, who then allowed the researchers to attend their workshop. At the workshop, the researchers were able to introduce themselves, describe the study and pass out their recruitment fliers. The
researchers were able to recruit ten participants at the workshop, and were able to interview all ten that same day.

Prior to conducting the interview, participants were given an informed consent form (see Appendix C). The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and were administered by the researchers. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting for the participants, in the conference rooms/office of Aspiranet. All ten interviews took place on January 27, 2012. After completing the interviews, participants were given a debriefing statement (see Appendix D), which described the study again and thanked them for their participation. Additionally, the participants received some incentives, a $5.00 gift card and candy, for their participation. Data analysis was conducted in the month of March 2012, and the results section was written in April 2012.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researchers took appropriate measures to ensure the protection of participants in this study. All participants were interviewed on a voluntary basis. Before the interviews, participants were given an informed consent form, as well as an audio consent form (see Appendix C), in
which they placed an X in the appropriate box to indicate their consent to participate and being audio taped. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, confidentiality, risks and benefits, who the study is being done by, who is supervising the study and IRB approval. Additionally, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary; therefore, they could stop at any time or refuse to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with.

The participants were not identified by name, but rather a number between one and ten, which was assigned to each interviewee. This protected the confidentiality of the participants. All data was stored by tape and computer, and only the researchers had access to it. Upon completion of the study, all data (audio tape and computer) was destroyed.

Data Analysis

This study used qualitative data analysis techniques. Audio taped raw data was transcribed verbatim. The researchers kept a journal throughout the study. The journal included notes on the method used, the categories and the criteria for coding each category. The journal also
included any notes about what transpired during the interview and how the researchers obtained their participants.

This study used first-level coding for the purpose of organizing the data. The researchers identified meaning units and categories, fit them into categories and assigned codes to categories. The second level coding was conducted by identifying similarities and differences between categories, themes, or patterns that emerged from the data set. The researchers established credibility due to their training and previous experience, recording in their journal and following the study's procedures. To ensure the consistency of the data, this study employed triangulation. Multiple perspectives from both the researchers and their advisor were compared to ensure the credibility of their analysis.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology that was used in this study. This study used a qualitative design, conducting face-to-face interviews of ten emancipated foster youths. The interviews were conducted by an interview guide and participation was voluntary. This
chapter also presented the procedures used and the measures the researchers took in order to protect the subjects being interviewed. In addition, data analysis for qualitative research, which pertains to this study, was discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

In this study, ten emancipated foster youths were interviewed to examine their perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. This chapter reports on the findings found within the study. Four areas were addressed within this study: experience with social workers, social worker's attitude and services, social worker's contributions and the strengths/weaknesses of the social worker.

Presentation of the Findings

Of the ten emancipated foster youths, seven were female and three were male. The participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-three years of age. The ethnic makeup was two Caucasian, one Latino, one African American, three Caucasian and Hispanic mix, one African American and Cuban mix, one African American and Native American mix and one African American/Samoan/Native American/Creole.

The emancipated foster youths had various amounts of time in foster care before emancipation. One participant was in foster care for two years, another was in for three
years. One was in foster care for ten years and two were in care for sixteen years. The other five participants were in foster care for eighteen years. Of the ten participants, six reported having five or more placements throughout their time in care. The other four participants had less than three placements.

Open-ended interview questions were used to examine emancipated foster youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes per person. The participant's responses were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to provide information on common themes that emerged. A total of four areas were addressed during the interview: experience with social worker, social worker's attitude and services, social worker's contribution and strengths/weaknesses of the social worker. Within these four areas common themes developed. These themes are relevant to the main focus of the project and emerged from the narratives of the participants.

**Experience with Social Worker**

Within this area, the participants explained how many social workers they had during their time in foster care, how often they received a new social worker and described
their experiences with their social worker. When asked how many social workers each of the participants had, most of the participants had to remember the exact number, often taking time to count all of their workers. One stated having only two social workers, two stated they had five, two said they had six, two said they had seven, one said they had nine and one said between ten and twelve. One participant said many, meaning he had so many social workers that he lost track of the number.

All ten participants stated that they received a new social worker at different times. Some participants responded by saying every couple of months they were transferred to a new worker, while other participants said every couple of years. One participant stated that there wasn't a time frame, but that they got a new worker when someone quit, was transferred or was fired. The last question of this category asked participants to describe their experience with their social worker(s). Participant’s responses on the questions were quite mixed. Some categories that emerged from this question were: caring, empowering, cooperative, listening and advocacy. Out of the ten participants, six stated that they had a good experience with a social worker. One participant stated,
"The good social workers helped me see that people actually care, about their jobs and about the children. That you're not just a name, not just a number, you're an individual" (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012).

Another participant stated, "My social workers for the most part were caring and cooperative" (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).

Although most of the participants listed positive experiences with their social workers, all of the participants had some type of negative experience with a social worker. Categories that emerged from the negative responses were: not listening, treating them as a case file instead of a person, not caring and not understanding. One participant said, "Dislikes with the majority of the social workers that I had, they were more prevalent to talk to the caregivers, not the actual child" (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant stated, "It was never really a close relationship" (Participant 2, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant said, "She was there and always checking up but she didn't really listen to the needs of me and my other foster siblings" (Participant 8, personal communication, January 2012).
Social Worker's Attitude and Services

In this area, the ten emancipated foster youths were asked eight questions pertaining to how they felt about their social worker's attitude as well as the services that their social worker provided to them. When the emancipated foster youths were asked how they felt about services that social workers provided to them, again, their responses were mixed. Five of the ten foster youths were pleased, whereas the other five were dissatisfied. Foster youths who were pleased disclosed that their social workers were awesome in informing them about resources, were given the opportunity to be in the Independent Living Program because of their social worker, were given everything they needed before emancipation and had all of their needs met. For example, one participant stated, "The good social workers were awesome. They told me about these resources and it helped me in my life. The stuff they told me helped me, it helped me in my daily life, and I love those services" (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant agreed stating, "I got into the Independent Living Program because of my social worker. They helped me get out and get into the right placement" (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012).
The five foster youths who were dissatisfied with services reported that social workers did not provide services other than their monthly visit, had to ask over and over again to try to get the things they needed, treated them like a paycheck, were unaware of emancipation, and had difficulty meeting their needs. For instance, one participant stated, "Looking back they really didn’t provide any services, do their monthly visit and that was technically it. We had to ask the social worker to enroll me in the Independent Living Program" (Participant 2, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant said, "I wasn’t aware of all the services available to foster children until later on, close to emancipation. Once informed, I was pleased" (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).

When the foster youths were asked if they felt that their social worker was always available to answer any questions they had, four participants said yes, their social worker was always available, two answered no, one said sometimes and sometimes not, one could not answer and two separated their responses by stating that the good social workers they came into contact with were available, but the bad ones were not. Some categories that emerged
from participants who said that social workers were always available were good communication from social workers, good phone availability, social workers were always available to answer questions and any questions the foster youth had were always answered in a timely manner. One participant declared, "Most of them, almost all of them provided me with a cell phone number so that I could contact them when they were away from their desk and they all responded to me in a timely manner" (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).

When respondents were asked if they felt that their social workers listened to their concerns, their responses were, again, mixed. Two reported that their social worker did listen to their concerns; four reported that the good ones or some of their social workers listened to their concerns and one said sometimes. One of the positive responses was, according to one participant, "The good ones yes, even if I couldn’t talk to them. If I left a message on Monday, she got to me by Wednesday, saying ‘got your message.’ So yeah, communication was key with them” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). However, negative views on social workers listening to their concerns were revealed by three participants. For
example, one participant said, "Sometimes they listened, but they didn’t do anything. So listening... it falls upon deaf ears. They were writing notes, but nothing happened" (Participant 9, personal communication, January 2012).

Foster youths were asked if they felt that their social workers allowed them to make choices while they were in foster care. Four youths stated that their social worker allowed them to make choices while in care, for example, "Yes, they did, but when I was younger I wanted to make choices that I wasn’t really mature enough to make, but as I got older they gave me a lot of freedom and choices in my case" (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012). On the other hand, four youths stated that their social worker did not allow them to make choices. For example, one participant said, "I don’t think that because they say that we had rights but every time I try to express that it seemed like they were being ignored" (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012). Additionally, two youths separated their answer by stating that the good social workers allowed them to make choices, but the bad social workers did not, for example, "The first three yes, the other two no" (Participant 10, personal communication, January 2012).
When the emancipated foster youths were asked if their social worker was reachable when they needed him/her, their responses were mixed. Three said yes their social worker was always reachable, one said sometimes, one said sometimes yes and sometimes no, three said no they were never able to reach their social worker when they needed them and two participants stated that the good social workers where reachable, but the bad social workers were not. One participant stated, “Sometimes no and sometimes yes depending on how busy they were. They tend to get busy” (Participant 6, personal communication, January 2012).

Participants were asked if their social worker saw them in a timely manner. Three participants stated yes, three stated no, two stated that the good ones did, but the bad ones did not, and one participant was unsure. One of the positive responses was, according to one participant, “Not all of them, but most of them did because of their schedules. They have other caseloads and stuff like that, but the one social worker I had for the longest period of time met me periodically and on time” (Participant 8, personal communication, January 2012).

All ten emancipated youths were asked if their social worker provided services to them in a timely manner. Seven
youths said “Yes,” they were provided services in a timely manner and two youths said “No”. One youth said that the first three social workers did, but the others did not. Out of the seven youths who responded yes, one youth acknowledged that the social worker got him into the Independent Living Program in a timely manner.

When respondents were asked if they felt ready to exit foster care before emancipation, four responded, “No” and six said, “Yes”. Two categories emerged from the participants who stated they did not feel ready to emancipate, such as not feeling prepared to exit foster care and being given no guidance. One participant said, “No one prepared me that it was coming. No one guided me through it until I got enrolled in the Independent Living Program” (Participant 2, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant indicated, “I was nowhere near prepared to exit the foster care system. On my birthday, my social worker picked me up, packed my belongings, took me to lunch and dropped me off at my friend’s house. That was my emancipation” (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012). On the other hand, six participants felt they were ready to exit. For example, one participant said,
"Yeah, I felt ready" (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012).

Foster youths were asked if their social worker offered them training for life skills prior to their emancipation. Six foster youths said "Yes," three said "No" and one youth said that the first three social workers did, but the last two did not. One participant stated, "Yes, I had tons of life skills classes, different types of classes from drug classes to educational stuff" (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant repeated, "I attended the Independent Living Program throughout my time in care" (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).

**Social Workers Contribution**

In this area, the ten participants were asked three questions regarding the social workers contribution to them. Foster youth were asked to explain how their social worker showed concern for their well being. Some categories that emerged were showed encouragement, interest, sympathy, emotion, sincerity and love.

Of the ten participants, two stated that they felt their social worker did not show concern for their well being. For example, one participant stated, "I wouldn't say
that they did ever. They never really questioned it” (Participant 2, personal communication, January 2012).

While the other eight participants stated that their social worker did show concern. For instance, one participant said,

No matter what I did or how I acted, my social workers for the most part were always caring and responsive to what I had to say. They were very sympathetic. It was more than a business to them, it was like a passion. That was great! (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).

Another participant said, “I knew that one of my social workers did care about me because she did show emotion towards my situation and what I was going through” (Participant 8, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant stated, “Whenever I was down, the last worker always tried to bring me up. She had a fun spirited heart” (Participant 3, personal communication, January 2012).

When participants were asked if their social worker explained what was going on in their case plans, their responses were mixed. Three answered yes, four answered no, two said that the good social workers they had did explain
what was going on in their case plan although the bad social workers did not and one foster youth admitted to not knowing what a case plan was. One of the positive responses was, according to one participant, "My social worker told me all the court dates I had an option to go to. She told me everything I needed to know" (Participant 8, personal communication, January 2012). While one of the negative responses was, according to one participant, "My social worker hid the case plan from me. She would say, 'it's confidential and I can't talk to you about it'" (Participant 5, personal communication, January 2012).

The foster youths were asked if their social worker was helpful with their education. Four foster youths disclosed that their social workers were helpful with their education. For example, one participant stated, "She even went to my graduation. Her supervisor still gives me information for scholarships and stuff" (Participant 3, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant said, "My last social worker was helpful with my education. She pushed me to do it. I wouldn't have graduated if she hadn't pushed me" (Participant 9, personal communication, January 2012). On the other hand, three foster youths said their social workers were not helpful with their education.
For example, one participant stated, "The social worker before emancipation was not helpful. I didn’t know what college I wanted to attend and didn’t know how to pay for it. She didn’t know when I graduated high school. She wasn’t helpful" (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). The other three participant’s responses were mixed, stating that the good social workers they had were helpful with their education whereas the bad social workers were not. For example, “The first three yes, the last two no” (Participant 10, personal communication, January 2012).

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Social Worker**

Within this area, participants were asked to describe what they liked most/least about their social worker, what the social worker could have done better, advice for the social worker and whether they would recommend the social worker to current foster youth. For the first question, what the participants liked about their social worker, some categories that emerged were: consistency, compassion, love, empathy and taking the time to work with the youth. For example, one participant affirmed, "The good ones were consistent, vulnerable, and empathetic. Three strengths were consistency, compassion and love. Love of their calling, not so much of their job, because a job you clock
out, but a calling you do that 24/7” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant said, “I loved how they talked to me and they did stuff with me” (Participant 9, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant exclaimed, “The last one I liked because she said I needed to be school oriented. We made a plan, I liked that she took the time out to do this” (Participant 10, personal communication, January 2012).

When asked what the participants disliked about their social worker, some categories that emerged were: not caring, poor communication, unable to contact them and being treated as less than a person. One participant said, “I didn't like how they just didn't care, that I was just an appointment that needed to be met” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). Another participant repeated stating, “She had poor communication. She never talked to me” (Participant 5, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant said, “They were never there. They were never available if I had a question or concern” (Participant 9, personal communication, January 2012).

All ten participants believe that their social worker could have done something better to improve their
relationship. Categories that emerged were: better communication, showing more concern and understanding, and offer more services/classes/information. One participant stated,

If they were able to give out more classes, more knowledge, I think that would be what the social worker should do. Because if you give more knowledge, knowledge is power, the more you have the stronger you are in your mind. (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012).

Another participant said, “Social workers need to learn how to communicate with the children because you are their only gateway to help” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012). And another participant suggested, “She could have showed more concern” (Participant 5, personal communication, January 2012).

When asked to give advice to their social worker, categories that emerged were: to not give up, hire more social workers to lower the caseload, love what you're doing, and listen to the foster youth. Some of the responses were as follows:

"Really listen to what the foster youth has to say. Not
listen with your 'ears, but with your heart”
(Participant 8, personal communication, January 2012).

“The good ones, keep doing it. Please don't burn out”
(Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012).

“You should love what you are doing so you shouldn't just do it for the money or there is no point in doing it at all” (Participant 4, personal communication, January 2012).

Most of the participants broke the last question into two parts, stating that they would recommend the good social workers to current foster youth. However, they would not recommend the bad social workers to current foster youth. For example, one participant said, “The good ones yes, the bad ones I wouldn't recommend to anybody” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 2012).

Another participant declared,

I would refer two of them to current foster youth, the other ones no. I believe they are overworked, their caseloads are entirely too heavy. I think they should hire more and level out caseloads and have time to attend to the kids. (Participant 7, personal communication, January 2012).
And another participant repeated by saying, "The last two no, but the first three yes because they were helpful, nice and they cared about the foster kids instead of the foster parents" (Participant 10, personal communication, January 2012).

Four areas were examined in order to help get a clear understanding of the foster youth and social worker relationship. From these four areas, the major themes that developed were: compassion, caring, responsiveness, helpfulness, communication and being treated like an individual. The participants want a social worker that shows compassion and is caring towards them, while being helpful and responsive to their needs. The participants stated that communication is the biggest element of the relationship, emphasizing that being able to communicate with a foster youth is extremely important. The participants also stated that being treated like a person instead of a case file allows them to build a relationship with their social worker. These themes that emerged showed how the participants felt about their relationship with their social workers and what they would want from their social worker.
Summary

The responses reported in this chapter were obtained from ten face to face interviews of emancipated foster youths. Audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed for their thematic content. The responses indicated some common themes that helped to examine the perceptions of the emancipated foster youth regarding their relationships with their social workers. The themes that emerged were: compassion, caring, responsiveness, helpfulness, communication and being treated like an individual.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides a presentation of the results from this study and recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research. This chapter comes to a close with a clause on limitations and a summarization of the study.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine emancipated foster youths' perceptions of the relationships that they shared with their social workers while they were in foster care. The ten foster youths in the study were enthusiastic about sharing their perceptions of their social workers. The foster youths, through their interview responses with the researchers, provided positive and negative aspects of their experiences with their social workers and offered suggestions for social workers to improve the foster care experience by enhancing the shared relationship. The foster youths’ responses, during conversations, presented the researchers with significant information about their
relationships which lead to specific detailed conclusions concerning the youths' experiences while in care.

The foster youths in this study were clear about what they wanted and expected from their social workers. The majority of the foster youths expressed a desire for their social worker to show them concern and compassion while also making the youth feel that they were genuinely cared for. This finding is consistent with Geenen and Powers' study finding (2007) which indicated that foster youths wanted caring and long term relationships as they transition through the foster care system. Foster youths preferred to have a social worker that was responsive to their immediate needs and their long term needs. Most of the foster youths agreed that a social worker that was helpful and knew how to communicate was a good social worker and that a social worker with those skills were indicative of whether or not they were able to develop a positive relationship with that social worker.

A common request of the foster youth was to be treated as an individual and to be given the opportunity to make choices, have their needs met, be heard, and made aware of emancipation early on. These results support the finding of Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs and Ross (2010), which specified
that foster youth felt important when they were provided with the Independent Living Program and options for life after emancipation. Foster youth who felt they had choices with such things like their education or decisions in their case plans, were more inclined to have a positive perception of the relationship they shared with their social worker. This finding is supported by Unger 's study (2004), which suggested that foster youth want to have an identity while cultivating their well-being and control over the choices being made about them. Participants in this study acknowledged that they wanted a social worker who was available and eager to provide services to them in a timely manner.

The study revealed that the foster youth had difficulties forming relationships with their social workers, when they had multiple placements and social workers coming in and out of their lives. This affected the social worker and foster youth relationship. Most of the foster youths articulated the need to have a social worker who will stay in their lives longer providing stability, and for their social worker to be willing to listen and understand them. The results from this study indicated that foster youth who had positive experiences with their social
workers were more likely to establish a relationship with that worker, whereas foster youth who had negative experiences were less likely to form an attachment with their social worker. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs and Ross' study (2010), which suggested that foster youth wanted to spend time building the shared relationship with their social workers.

The study found that the social worker's attitude and services provided to foster youth were a factor in whether or not the foster youths viewed their experience as positive or negative. The foster youths had mixed feelings about the services and attitudes of their social workers. Half of the foster youths were satisfied with the provision of services such as the Independent Living Program which was used to teach them life skills and offer them help with emancipation. These results were supported by Barth (1990), which stated that foster youths needed life skills preparation and preferred to have had emancipation planning. The other half of foster youths, who had a negative perception of the social worker's services, also had a negative perception of the relationship with that social worker suggesting that insufficient services to
foster youths prevents a positive relationship from forming between the two.

All the emancipated foster youths offered advice for social workers. These youths suggested that social workers not give up on them and lower their case loads so that they are able to spend more time promoting relationships with the youth. This result supports the findings of the previous study in which foster youths wanted social workers to be paid a higher wage to reduce social worker turnover, lower their caseloads, and be committed to the youth (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010). The foster youths also suggested that social workers should love their jobs and remember to always actively listen to what foster youths are saying. Most of the foster youths insisted that the good social workers showed love and had empathy for them, which made foster youths more inclined to want to engage and build a relationship with that social worker. The foster youths who perceived their relationship with their social worker as positive indicated they would recommend that social worker to current foster youth; however, foster youths who perceived their relationship with their social worker as negative declined to recommend that social worker to current foster youth.
The results from this study were critical for understanding what emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers were. The findings in this study provided clarity for the research question, although often mixed, which inquired about emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. The foster youths’ experiences in the foster care system are interrelated to the relationship they shared with their social worker. Foster youths who had positive experiences demonstrated having a positive relationship with their social worker. On the contrary, foster youths who had negative experiences had a lack of a relationship with their social worker.

Limitations

One of the limitations in this study was the undersized convenient sampling that was used to interview emancipated foster youths. The sample size may not be a representative of all foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. A larger sample size could have produced more data in which more valid conclusions could have been drawn. Another limitation of this study was the lack of literature that examined foster
youths' perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. More qualitative studies exploring foster youths' perceptions and experiences would be beneficial in generating trustworthy and reliable information. Additionally, another limitation of the study was the difficulty of obtaining permission to interview emancipated foster youths. Foster youths' perceptions and experiences are a sensitive topic. These perceptions and experiences seem to be guarded or kept confidential within child welfare organizations. This factor made it complex when attempting to explore foster youths' perceptions and experiences with their social workers.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The results of this study should be used to develop policies, practices and ongoing research to promote the relationship between foster youth and social worker. The findings of this study suggest that social workers within San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services should be compassionate, caring, responsive, helpful, communicate with the foster youth and treat the youths as individuals.
In order for social workers to create a better bonding relationship with the foster youths on their caseload, the Department of Children and Family Services should hire more social workers, decreasing the amount of cases social workers have. By hiring more social workers and decreasing the caseload for each worker, it would increase the amount of time that a social worker would be able to spend with a foster youth. Having more time will allow the social worker to focus on each case, giving more time to make face-to-face contacts and actually connect with the foster youth. Having a lower number of caseloads would also allow the social workers to ensure the foster youth is able to receive all the services and resources available. It would enable them to be more responsive and helpful with ensuring the foster youth is successful.

The results of this study emphasize that communication between a foster youth and their social worker is key in building a relationship. As stated by Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs & Ross (2010), children need to be informed about their case, such as who would be caring for them and the context/dynamic of their foster home. Therefore, a policy and practice of showing a foster youth (above the age of twelve) their case plan that is being presented in court
should be set in place. This policy should make social workers show and discuss the case plan with the foster youth, having the youth sign a paper stating that they understand what their specific case plan is. Informing the foster youth about their case plan will increase the communication between the foster youth and the social worker, and allow them to be on the same page.

Another policy and practice that could be implemented to increase communication should be a minimum amount of time for face-to-face contacts. Because of the high number of cases and large amounts of paperwork to be completed, face-to-face contacts (or monthly visits) between a foster youth and their social worker may not be very long. Emancipated foster youths in this study stated that often these monthly contacts would be brief, where the social worker would ask specific questions and then have to leave to make another visit with another case. If the Department was able to hire more workers, decreasing the number of cases for each worker, a policy of allotting a minimum amount of time for face-to-face contacts should be implemented. For instance, each face-to-face contact needs to be a minimum of one hour. Having a full hour would allow the foster youth and the social worker to bond and

57
communicate properly. It would enable the social worker to find out what specific services the foster youth may need and what goals they may have.

The emancipated foster youths interviewed in this study stressed the importance of treating foster youths like equals or an individual. As shown by McLeod (2010), foster youths wanted to be treated like a person and not like a case file. As stated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, social workers need to remember to respect the dignity and worth of the person, no matter who they are. In order to ensure that social workers remember this core value, a policy of annual training for Department social workers should be developed. In this training, social workers will be reminded of the NASW Code of Ethics. Learning about the core values on a yearly basis will remind social workers that they need to respect every person on their caseload, including the foster youth, no matter what.

Additional research in this area, focusing on the relationship between a foster youth and a social worker, is needed. By conducting additional research, social workers will better understand what is expected and needed from them. By understanding what foster youths want from the
social worker, it will create better relationships which can impact the outcomes that foster youth have.

Conclusion

Although many of the participant's responses were mixed throughout the study, participants suggested that social workers within the Department of Children and Family Services need to be compassionate, caring, responsive, helpful, to communicate with the foster youths and treat the youths as individuals. The social workers that had these factors were able to create a positive relationship with the foster youth, which can have a positive impact on the foster youth's success. The most important conclusion from this study is that foster youths want social workers who actually care and treat them like individuals. If the Department and future social workers take this knowledge and apply it to their own cases, the relationship between foster youths and social workers would be positive and foster youth would be able to have a higher rate of success.
Demographics
1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. How long were you in foster care?
5. How many placements did you have while in foster care?

Experience with Social Worker
6. How many social workers did you have?
7. How often did you get a new social worker?
8. Please tell me about your experience with your social worker(s).

Social Worker’s Attitude and Services
9. How did you feel about the services that the social worker provided to you?
10. Did you feel that your social worker was always available to answer any questions you had?
11. Did you feel that your social worker listened to your concerns?
12. Did you feel your social worker allowed you to make choices while you were in foster care?
13. Was your social worker reachable when you needed him/her?
14. Did your social worker see you in a timely manner?
15. Did your social worker provide services in a timely manner?

16. Did you feel ready to exit foster care before you emancipated?

17. Did your social worker offer you training for life skills prior to your emancipation?

**Social Workers Contribution**

18. Please tell me about how your social worker showed concern for your well-being.

19. Did your social worker explain what was going on in your case plan?

20. Was your social worker helpful with your education?

**Strengths & Weaknesses of Social Worker**

21. What did you like the most about your social worker?

22. What did you like least about your social worker?

23. What could your social worker have done better?

24. What advice would you give to your social worker if you could speak to him/her?

25. Would you recommend the social worker you had to current foster youth?

Developed by Joni Renee Dominguez & Lakesha Lavone Spivey
Participation Recruitment Letter

We, Lakesha Spivey and Joni Dominguez, are student interns from California State University San Bernardino. In collaboration with San Bernardino County Children and Family Services, we are doing a study on Emancipated Foster Youths’ Perceptions of Their Relationships with Their Social Workers. The purpose of this study is to examine emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers while they were in the foster care system. This study will focus on the types of relationships that emancipated foster youth had with their social workers while in the foster care system. This study will give social workers the ability to see what would benefit the social worker-client relationship in child welfare. This study will consist of a 30-45 minute interview that contains 20 questions. Participants for this study must be between the ages of 18-25. No names will be used in this interview and the data will be destroyed upon completion of the study. A $5.00 gift card will be given to those that participate. If you are interested in being a part of this study, please call or email Lakesha Spivey or Joni Dominguez using the information below. You may also mail the bottom portion using the self-addressed envelope. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Lakesha Spivey
909-386-1365
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Joni Dominguez
909-386-1370
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I, __________________________, agree to participate in this interview study about
Print Name
Emancipated Foster Youths Perceptions of Their Relationships with Their Social workers.
Signature __________________________ My Phone Number is __________________________
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

The research study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their social workers. This study is being conducted by Joni Dominguez and Lakesha Spivey under the supervision of Professor Janet Chang at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to examine emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers while in the foster care system.

**Description:** If you take part in this study, you will be asked several questions in interview format about your experiences with social workers in the child welfare system.

**Participation:** Participation is completely voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits and you may discontinue participation at any time.

**Confidentiality:** All of your responses will remain confidential and anonymous with the researchers. All of the data will be destroyed once the study is completed.

**Duration:** The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and consists of twenty questions.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks to taking part in the study.

**Benefits:** The information received will help future social worker who are planning on working with foster youth. Participants will also receive a $5.00 gift card for the participation.

**Results:** The results of this study will be available upon completion in the summer of 2012.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or concerns about this study, feel free to contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5184.

By marking below, you agree that you have been fully informed about this survey and are volunteering to take part.

Place an X here _________________________________ Date ____________

I agree to be audio taped _______________________________ Date ____________
APPENDIX D

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate emancipated foster youths’ perceptions of their relationships with their social workers. In this study, foster youths’ experiences, needs, solutions, problems and suggestions were assessed. Foster youths’ perceptions of the partnerships with their social workers will influence the social worker-client relationship. The interview questions will provide information about foster youths’ experiences with social workers and social workers contributions to foster youths. We are particularly interested in the relationship between foster youths and social workers to understand what is needed to create encouraging social worker-client collaboration.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the interview questions with other youth. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Lakesha Spivey/Joni Dominguez or Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184 at the end of (Spring) Quarter of 2012.
REFERENCES


during their transition into adulthood. *Children & Youth Services Review, 29*(8), 1085-1101.


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

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

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Joni Dominguez & Lakesha Spivey

72