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ENCOURAGING FOSTER YOUTH TO PURSUE

THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

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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

Jessica Andrea Huitrado-Manio

June 2012

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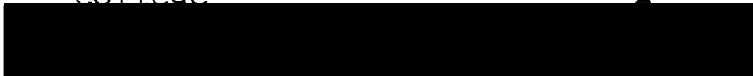
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by

Jessica Andrea Huitrado-Manio

June 2012

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ABSTRACT

Recently, spirituality has been given more attention due to emphasis on viewing the client holistically and encouragement for social work practitioners to be culturally sensitive or culturally competent. There is evidence to suggest that spirituality is a source of strength and resilience for many people, however little is known about the role of spirituality in the lives of foster youth. Given the major challenges foster youth face, spirituality may be an overlooked source of strength that can assist them in coping with difficult life circumstances. By distributing short surveys to a number of former foster youth, this study sought to explore the role of spirituality in the lives of foster youth, whether or not they participated in spiritual activities while in foster care, and what social workers and/or foster parents are doing to support foster youth's spiritual development. It found that spirituality did play a role in their lives, they participated in few spiritual activities while in care and social workers and/or foster parents did little to support foster youth's spiritual development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor and other professors who supported and guided me in completing this project. I would like to give a special thanks to my family and dearest friends for supporting me throughout the course of my graduate school experience. I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband as I could not have done this without his continuous love, encouragement, and support.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to the foster youth I have come to know, understand, and admire. Your stories of perseverance, courage, and faith inspire me every day.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Recently, spirituality in social work has been given more attention due to emphasis on viewing the client holistically and encouragement for social work practitioners to be culturally sensitive or culturally competent, however, little is known about how the concept of spirituality has been incorporated into the field of child welfare and its work with foster youth. This chapter includes an overview of the role spirituality plays in the field of social work and more specifically in the field of child welfare. It demonstrates why spirituality in the lives of foster youth is important and why child welfare agencies should make an effort in supporting foster youth's spiritual development. This chapter also includes why this study contributes to social work research, policy, and practice.

Problem Statement

As I sat and observed a panel of former foster youth speak to current foster youth at Riverside County's 2010 Independent Living Program's Youth Summit, I realized there was a theme in each of the former foster youth's

response when asked, "What kept them motivated?" More than half of the former foster youth referred to God or something of spiritual essence as their main source of motivation. They believed they had a purpose in life; they had meaning in their lives and had an overall desire to help other human beings break the cycle of abuse. It was at this moment, I realized how important spirituality was for these young people.

It cannot be argued that foster youth face a variety of challenges. As cited in Daining and DePanfilis (2007), the maltreatment foster youth have experienced leaves them at risk of many serious negative outcomes including, "underemployment, low educational attainment, homelessness, early parenthood, criminal activity, and mental health problems" (p. 1159). Given the wealth of studies that show spirituality is often times a source of strength and resilience for many young people, especially during times of tragedy or despair (as cited in Jackson et al., 2010) it may be beneficial for child welfare agencies to consider the incorporation of spirituality into its work with foster youth.

Many have argued that spirituality is an inevitable element of human development (Benson & Roelhkepartain,

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2008) that should be explored and supported; however, given the secular nature of child welfare services spirituality may make social workers feel uncomfortable (Heyman, Buchanan, Marlowe, & Sealy, 2006). As cited in DiLorenzo, Johnson, and Bussey (2001), "in the past, many social workers, including child welfare professionals, avoided any discussion of spirituality because they confuse the concept with religion" (p. 258). This however, should not be a reason to avoid the concept of spirituality and may indicate child welfare's need to do a better job at educating social work professionals and students about the concept of spirituality and how it can be used productively in the field of child welfare. This may also indicate that although the Council on Social Work Education requires spirituality to be incorporated into coursework (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2010), social work graduates may not be receiving the training needed to fully understand that they can incorporate spirituality into their work without tapping into the sensitive and sometimes controversial topic of religion. Therefore, it is vital to discuss the difference between spirituality and religion.

According to DiLorenzo and Nix-Early's (2004)
working definition of spirituality, it is, one or all of
the following:

> Having a belief in a higher power; developing the
> capacity to form meaningful relationships;
> developing a moral compass; enhancing one's personal
> capacity for going forward in spite of major
> challenges (overcoming); affiliating one's self with
> a set of rituals and beliefs that take the young
> person out of his or her daily routine; and
> possessing a personal hope for the future. It
> includes the ability of a person to achieve another
> level of intimacy; contemplate ways to improve one's
> self and to think about the long-term implications
> of one's behavior and actions. (p. 2)

Religion, on the other hand, is a specific fundamental
set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a
number of people or groups such as the Christian religion
or Buddhist religion. It is important to understand that
although spirituality has a place in religion,
spirituality and religion are not the same. Consequently,
an individual can be spiritual without being religious.

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As cited in Crisp (2008) "the social work profession has not, for most of its history, recognized the importance of spirituality in the lives of either service users or the professional workforce" (p. 366). Despite CSWE's requirement to include spirituality into undergraduate and graduate coursework, a study conducted on social work students found them to have had little training in the arena of spirituality and very few, if any, courses on the concept of spirituality during their graduate studies in social work (Sheridan et al. 1992). This may be the reason why spirituality is rarely incorporated into social work practice despite evidence that shows it is beneficial for families' rates of reunification (Lietz & Hodge, 2010). This is cause for concern as social work practitioners may be undermining an important and relevant dimension of their clients.

When considering spirituality in the lives of adolescents, studies show adolescents are indeed in touch with their spirituality and benefit from participating in spiritual activities such as meditation, yoga, the arts, prayer, and bible study (Wilson, 2002). Agencies that incorporate spiritual activities into youth programs show youth were better able to manage their anger, problem

solve, and had direction in lives. It should be noted that others have encouraged professionals who work with young people to view spirituality as a core developmental process that occurs for all youth; this way, it will be prioritized and incorporated into assessment and intervention (Benson & Roelhkepartain, 2008).

As studies have shown elements of one's spirituality are a source of strength and resiliency, studies have shown this is also true for foster youth. This is incredibly relevant as foster youth have experienced an almost insurmountable amount of trauma and tragedy in their young lives. According to DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) spirituality played a role in coping skills among foster youth, but they reported having few spiritual outlets while in foster care. This study also found that not only were foster youth disconnected from biological ties when removed from the care of their parents, they were disconnected from community connections, one being religious affiliations and due to this disconnect, foster youth may be at risk of having a "spiritual void." If youth are being disconnected from a spiritual outlet such as church and their case workers are doing little to support them spiritually, it can be assumed this may

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negatively affect their well-being and more specifically, erase a source of strength for them.

When events like this take place, it is a contradiction to child welfare's attempts to operate on "best practice". It can be argued that unless child welfare agencies begin to asses for and incorporate spirituality into the lives of foster youth, they may be overlooking a vital aspect of foster youth's lives, 'an aspect of their lives that may lead to more well adjusted foster youth and contribute to better outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out if former foster youth ages 18 to 21 participating in the Independent Living Program at Riverside Community College incorporate spirituality into their daily lives. The study also identified what spiritual activities they participated in while in foster care and whether or not they feel their spiritual journey was supported by child welfare workers and/or foster parents. Based on previous research it was hypothesized that former foster youth would report they incorporate spirituality into their daily lives, participated in few spiritual activities

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while in care, and do not feel their spiritual journey was supported. Former foster youth age 18 to 21 participating in the Independent Living Program at Riverside Community College were included in this study and were given a survey that lasted no longer than 15 minutes.

If former foster youth reported they had few spiritual outlets while in foster care, it could be argued that social workers did not ensure the foster youth they worked with participated in spiritual activities and as a result, did not support their spiritual development. Participants in the study were asked specific questions about spirituality and placements such as while in foster care, did anyone have a meaningful conversation with you about your own spiritual beliefs? While in foster care, were you placed in a foster home(s) that shared the same spiritual beliefs as you? If results indicated child welfare workers did not tend to the spiritual needs of foster youth it may also indicate a need for child welfare agencies to be more culturally sensitive.

By conducting this study using the survey research method, the cost was relatively inexpensive. This

research method has a greater likelihood of reaching a large number of participants and the use of standardized questions made measurement of the variables more precise. By using a survey method the measurement tool was more reliable as it left little to interpretation and a wide variety of questions were asked without losing sight of the purpose of the study.

This study sought to fill in the gaps that exist in existing literature related to spiritually and foster youth. This study explored the importance of spirituality in the lives of foster youth and shed light on what child welfare agencies can do to improve the lives of foster youth while in care. More importantly, this study encourages social work professionals to view spirituality as a core developmental process that occurs for all individuals, all in an effort to improve outcomes upon their exit from foster care.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study is needed not only because it is relevant to the field of social work, but it is specifically relevant to child welfare practice. Although there is evidence to suggest that spirituality is important to

foster youth, the amount of research conducted is minimal. In addition, no studies have investigated whether or not former foster youth felt their spiritual development was encouraged by child welfare workers or foster parents while in foster care. This study attempts to fill in that gap.

The results of this study contribute to social work practice and policy in a variety of ways. First, this study will seek to improve, what child welfare refers to as "best practice" when addressing the assessment phase of generalist intervention. Second, if child welfare workers include the dimension of spirituality into their biopsychosocial assessments, they would be truly assessing the client as a "whole person." If child welfare workers make an effort to assess spirituality among foster youth, not only would the worker be demonstrating cultural competency, he/she would be making an effort in identifying the young person's current coping skills or elements of strength, that would be otherwise overlooked and ignored. If social workers make an effort to assess a young person's spirituality they may be supporting an aspect of the young person that may

contribute to resiliency, supporting the young person's sense of purpose and direction in their life.

Not only does this study offer knowledge on how to improve "best practice," it hopefully encourages policy makers to ensure the spiritual dimension of child welfare clients is not ignored. The identification of lifelong connections has been incorporated into policy due to a wealth of research that found better outcomes for foster youth were significantly correlated with a positive relationship with a caring adult. Likewise, it is anticipated that if a wealth of knowledge addressing spirituality in social work can be accumulated, the need for child welfare workers to support and purposefully inquire about spirituality will become policy.

Last, this study is significant because it encourages undergraduate and graduate social work programs to ensure their students are well trained on the topic of spirituality. Currently CSWE requires social work schools to incorporate spirituality into the assessment of clients, but it is difficult to say how effective this requirement has been, as one research study found social work graduates reported little to no courses on the topic of spirituality. It is anticipated

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that with more studies demonstrating the benefits of incorporating spirituality in social work, social work schools will do a better job at educating their students about their client's spirituality. As a result, social work graduates will not only acquire better assessment skills, they will be better able to work with clients who openly express their spirituality and/or religious beliefs.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary and critical review
of existing literature related to spirituality in social
work and literature which demonstrates a direct link
between spirituality and the role it plays in coping
skills for youth. This chapter includes a review of
studies directly addressing spirituality and spirituality
among foster youth will be emphasized. This chapter
identifies gaps in the literature and addresses the
theoretical framework that supports the notion that
spirituality should be viewed as an inevitable aspect of
human development. It also includes how Erik Erikson's
Stages of Development, James Fowlers Stages of Faith, and
Attachment Theory have a place in spiritual development.
More importantly, this chapter better demonstrates why
the proposed study is needed.

Attitude towards Spirituality in
the Field of Social Work

Historically, social work has its roots in
spirituality due to the "friendly visitors" movement.

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According to Popple and Leighinger (2008), the friendly visitors were missionaries and volunteers who tended to the needs of the poor and initially believed the poor were morally flawed and spiritually weak. Eventually, the idea that the poor were morally and spiritually weak waned and friendly visitors began to realize that environmental factors played a significant role in the issue of poverty.

As cited in an article by Davis, Kerr, and Kurpius (2003), the field of social work began to adopt Freudian theories from the field of psychology, which interestingly enough, stated religion and one's spirituality was a factor that influenced mental illness and delusions among his clients. Therefore, at this time in the field of social work an individual's belief system related to religion or spirituality was not included in the assessment or treatment phases.

More time passed and Spencer (1961) began to advocate for social workers to prioritize an individual's religious affiliations as he believed the spiritual and religious aspect of a client may be a source of strength, not a source of mental illness. Along with the help of Joseph (1988), spirituality began to be presented in the

context of human development and eventually, the field of social work began to view an individual's religion and spirituality as a relevant area to focus attention on in social work practice.

Heyman, Buchanan, Marlowe, and Sealy (2006) conducted a study that examined social workers' attitudes towards the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. They found that social workers were more likely to have a positive attitude towards religion and spirituality if they participated in spiritual activities themselves and had taken a course in spiritual development. The study found that the more years the social worker spent in the field of social work, the less likely they were to have been trained about the role of spirituality and religion in social work practice. These findings support the idea that it is imperative for social workers to be educated about spiritual development in the field of social work. Undergraduate and graduate programs in social work should ensure their students receive the training needed to make certain they are not only culturally competent, but able to tap into a source of strength in their clients. This study suggests that due to a lack of curriculum in the topic of spirituality,

social workers may be left feeling uncomfortable interviewing their clients about topics such as spirituality which has in the past been considered, private.

Benefits of Spirituality in Social Work

According to Mountain (2005) religious and non-religious children felt the spiritual activity of prayer was helpful to them when dealing with life problems. Not only did prayer help them during significant moments in life, but prayer helped the children clarify and articulate deep feelings. As prayer was defined as way to express one's spirituality, Mountain's research is relevant to the proposed study because it supports the idea that a spiritual activity such as prayer is not only a positive way to cope, but it is an opportunity for children to focus on positive things in their life. The article suggests that professionals in child welfare should recognize prayer as a coping mechanism and an aid to help youth verbally express deep feelings. Overall, it offers an idea for caseworkers and foster parents to encourage foster

children to participate in a spiritual activity such as prayer to cope with difficult life situations.

According to DiLorenzo, Johnson, and Bussey (2001), social workers should not underestimate the element of spirituality and should see it as an important aspect of a parent's recovery. The article discusses how a parent's spirituality has a significant influence on their ability to responsibly parent their children and caseworkers should encourage a parent "to pursue her own spiritual path" (p. 270).

As cited in DiLorenzo, Johnson, and Bussey (2001), Cohen (2000) discusses spirituality and wellness in recovery stating, "whether the client reads, meditates, prays, or participates in healing groups, spiritual communities, or AA/NA, she will feel a sense of belonging and connection that is markedly different from the isolation she lived with a consequence of drinking or taking drugs" (p. 271). The article also states women who abuse their children, were often abused themselves, and their unresolved trauma leads to a loss of their spirituality, a major aspect of their recovery process. This article notes that drug addicted clients are at risk of coming to a "spiritual dead-end." Waiting for addicted

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parents to hit "rock bottom" is dangerous because if they get to a spiritual dead-end they may become unable to response physically and spiritually to a treatment plan.

This is similar to a study by DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) who investigated the role of spirituality in the lives of foster youth. They noted that foster youth may come to a "spiritual dead-end" at an early age as well and as this article suggests, it could be dangerous. This research offers more support that spirituality is an important area to be tapped into when overcoming life's challenges. It reported that caseworkers should initiate a conversation with their drug addicted clients about their meaning of life and this can apply to work with foster youth. It might be beneficial to start that conversation with foster youth as well to prevent the occurrence of a "spiritual dead-end."

Davis, Kerr, and Kurpus (2003) investigated the relationship between anxiety and spirituality among 45 male and female high school students who were considered to be at-risk. They found that higher levels of spiritual, existential, and religious well-being among males were related to lower levels of anxiety. Overall,

the study found that the relationship between spirituality and anxiety matters among at-risk adolescents. It suggested that counselors who work with at-risk youth should help them explore their relationship with a transcendent power, or help develop their own vision of the future, dispelling the idea that their life is meaningless and lacks purpose.

A landmark study conducted by Wilson (2002) sought to find out whether or not spirituality and religious activities were implemented in a variety of agencies and programs around the United States. The study did not determine what worked, but discovered more about how spirituality and religious activities were being implemented in programs that served the needs of adolescents. Agencies were asked about spiritual activities which included activities like "routine education about the spiritual self, meditation, yoga, self reflection through guided visualization/relaxation, musical expression, traditional martial arts, 12-step programs, and secular rites of passage programs." They were also asked about religious activities such as "bible or prayer groups, clergy programs, curriculum-based religious instruction, religious counseling, and

religious rites of passage programs" (p. 15). They found that over half of youth-serving agencies use one or more secular activities with clients, and a smaller percentage use one or more religious activities. Regardless of the particular activity in question, spirituality activities were reported to help youth relax, manage their anger, and think constructively about their lives. This article shows that agencies and programs are already implementing spiritual activities and report positive changes.

Spirituality and Foster Youth

As mentioned earlier, DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) investigated the role of spirituality in the lives of foster youth and reported that foster youth may be at risk of reaching a "spiritual dead-end" at an early age. They also wanted to know how foster youth defined spirituality, if it was important to their daily lives, and whether it was useful to them during tough times. They explored how foster youth expressed their spirituality and how best to integrate it into the foster care experience. DiLorenzo and Nix (2004) found most of the youth had experience in a Christian religion and described them to be mostly positive except for a group

of boys from Sudan. Most of the youth found early religious practice to be irrelevant and suggested that church should be optional. Most also reported a moderate degree of spirituality with almost all of the participants stating art was their favorite way to express their deep inner feelings. The researchers found spirituality was not a resource teens used in adult lives. Instead, they "sleep, write, talk to friends, smoke marijuana, work, or talk to someone wise" (p. 4) when they are in crisis. Despite this, the foster youth reportedly enjoyed spiritual activities such as, taking walks, listening to music, and being silent, using these activities during times of need or to relax. The foster youth knew what spirituality was, but had few spiritual outlets.

This article supports the idea that caseworkers and foster parents should encourage spiritual development by giving foster youth spiritual outlets. They should not force spirituality on foster youth or be judgmental about their existing religious practices. Given the poor outcomes of foster youth, the findings of this article give child welfare professionals one possible explanation as to why foster youth make such poor decisions such as

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experimenting with drugs/alcohol, failing academically, and early sexual activity. It could be they have come to a "spiritual dead-end" as DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) suggest.

The Casey Field Office of Mental Health (2007) conducted a study that investigated mental health, ethnicity, sexuality, and spirituality among foster youth. The study included 188 youth ages 14 to 17 who were receiving services from Casey Family Programs. They found that a majority of youth said they believe in God, a Creator, or a Higher Power; and most youth participated in spiritual activities on a regular basis and considered those activities helpful. In addition, they found that youth used a variety of activities as a way to cope when something bad happened. These activities included, spending time alone, praying, sharing a problem with someone, writing in a journal, or doing something creative. This study concluded that foster youth find "strength and support for healing in their spiritual beliefs, spiritual practices, and spiritual communities" (p. 39).

Implications for child welfare agencies include the suggestion that child welfare workers should inquire

about spirituality and include this inquiry in the assessment stage of intervention. The Casey study suggested spirituality be incorporated into casework, and youth should be supported by workers and foster families to participate in spiritual activities. The proposed study attempted to find out if case workers and foster families are doing so.

Jackson, White, O'Brien, DiLorenzo, Cathcart, Wolf, Bruskas, Pecora, Nix-Early, and Cabrera (2010) investigated perceptions of spirituality among youth in foster care. They asked youth to define the beliefs and practices they view as spiritual, whether certain factors such as love and forgiveness help them heal and what positive activities they engage in to cope with hardship. They wanted to know whether they view spiritual activities as helpful and whether they have spiritual goals. Just as the Casey Field Office of Mental Health Study found, this study found a majority of youth said they believe in God and reported they gained spiritual strength by trusting in God. Most youth stated they remain hopeful through their hardships and that love and forgiveness contribute to their healing. This study found that foster youth had active spiritual lives with almost

half of them stating they participated in spiritual activities at least once a week. Most of the youth stated they believed spirituality was an asset in their lives. In addition, almost all of the youth stated they had spiritual goals, the top three being to follow God's plan for me; become a better person; and know my purpose in life. The results of this study greatly differ from the study conducted by DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) who found youth to be spiritually disconnected and did not prioritize their spirituality.

Last, Lietz and Hodge (2011) conducted a study that involved in-depth interviews with fifteen families who completed their child welfare case plans; reunited with their children; and stayed together for at least one year past the termination of their case. This study sought to identify the strengths within these families and found that twelve participants said their spiritual beliefs, practices, and faith communities were a major source of strength for them during this difficult time in their lives. This study, along with the other research on the topic, indicates the need for more research to be done on the role of spirituality in child welfare.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Faith Development Theory by James Fowler (1981) states that faith is not about religious beliefs, but it is "a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose" (p. 4). He explains that faith is developed in stages and starts with one's relationships with caregivers early in life; as early as birth. This determines how one fits into the world which directly impacts the development of faith. Since this current study is concerned with adolescents, it is important to consider what stage Fowler believes adolescents frequently fall under. This stage is known as Synthetic-Conventional Faith. Synthetic Conventional Faith is when an adolescent's values and beliefs are determined, but they have yet to fully examine why or how they got there. This leaves an opportunity for child welfare workers, foster parents, and any other significant individuals in their lives to assist in the process.

Attachment Theory is also relevant in regards to relationships and how they play a role in spirituality because spirituality includes having meaningful

relationships with others and achieving a deeper level of intimacy. According to Turner (1996), attachment theory says that one's quality of attachments during early life can affect how the quality of attachment to others for the rest of their lives. This directly relates to Faith Development Theory which proposes faith begins to form at birth through attachments to primary caregivers. What these posits may predict for youth included in the study is that the quality of attachments they had early in life may affect their development of faith and ultimately how impactful spirituality is in their lives. As the current study is concerned with the role of spirituality in the lives of foster youth, it identified who had meaningful conversations with foster youth about spirituality and predicted that such person would have a significant relationship with the youth. Hence, connecting spirituality in the lives of former foster youth with faith development and attachment theory.

Erik Erikson's Stages of Development Theory (Lesser and Pope, 2007) is also a driving force for this study because it describes development in a series of stages similar to faith development theory. Particularly, when an individual is an adolescent they are in the stage of

identity vs. role confusion. They are given the life task of finding out who they are and how they fit into the world. They are to become their own individual and this can be challenging for a young person. For example, when an individual is age 12 to 18 years, life is complex because the individual is no longer a child, but not an adult either. The individual works towards finding their own identity, may struggle with social interactions, and struggle with moral issues. When considering DiLorenzo and Nix-Early's (2004) definition of spirituality, one can see how spirituality fits into Erikson's stages of development because spirituality includes developing a moral compass, a concept of self and meaningful relationships with others. Spirituality appears to exist in many of Erik Erikson's stages of development: While each stage has a goal, expressing oneself spiritually may help aid someone in reaching such goals. This relates to faith development theory as they both propose that development of faith during the adolescent years is highly influenced by the relationships they have with other people.

Considering all three theories, it can be said that foster youth may be at risk of poor attachments early in

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life that may impact how successful they are at completing critical developmental tasks as described by Erik Erikson and James Fowler. As each theory highlights the importance of relationships to one's self, others, and the larger world, it may be important to find out how participation in spiritual activities while in foster care may nurture relationships with other people. It is crucial for social workers to determine what developmental stage foster youth are at in order to better identify their needs and determine what spiritual activities would suit them the best. It is also important to find out whom foster youth are talking to about spirituality and ultimately, whether or not they feel spirituality helps them stay motivated to reach their life goals.

Summary

Considering what is known about spiritual development among youth, more specifically the limited information about foster youth, it would be beneficial for more research to be conducted. There is not a lot known about spirituality among foster youth and the studies discussed had differing results and various

limitations. There is a lot of data on how religion has positive outcomes for youth, but there is a lack of research offering support for spiritual activities that have a positive impact on the well-being of foster youth. In order for policies and programs to incorporate spiritual activities into their policies, empirical data must be available. Studies investigating the relationship between spirituality and problematic behaviors are needed. Also many of the studies include samples which can only be applied to youth in general terms. It would be wise to conduct research on more specific diverse populations, paying close attention to groups overrepresented in the child welfare system. Last, there are no data available on whether or not foster parents and caseworkers are encouraging spiritual development and this is the missing piece of literature that the proposed study will speak to. As the field of spiritual development of youth is quite new, research for spiritual development among foster youth is greatly needed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of research

methods used to conduct this study. This section

addresses issues such as study design, anticipated

limitations, intended procedures, sampling methods, and

data collection instruments that will be used. The

protection of human subjects has been considered as well

as the methods for data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to find out if former

foster youth ages 18 to 21 participating in the

Independent Living Program at Riverside Community College

incorporate spirituality into their daily lives and if

their own spirituality is a source of strength for them.

The study found out what spiritual activities they

participated in while in foster care and whether or not

they feel their spiritual journey was supported by child

welfare workers and/or foster parents. In addition, this

study attempted to find out of positive coping skills are

associated with higher rates of spirituality. Based on

previous research studies, it was hypothesized that former foster youth will report spirituality was a source of strength for them and they incorporate spirituality into their daily lives, but they participated in few spiritual activities while in care, and do not feel their spiritual journey was supported.

Fifty-one former foster youth age 18 to 21 participating in the Independent Living Program (ILP) at Riverside Community College (RCC) were included in the study and took part in a short survey. Participants in the study were asked specific questions about spirituality and placements including questions such as: Were you placed in a foster home that shared the same spiritual beliefs as you? While in foster care, did anyone have a meaningful conversation with you about your own spiritual beliefs? They were also asked if they were transported to any spiritual activities they participated in.

Sampling

The researcher arranged for RCC-ILP Emancipation Coaches to distribute surveys during their meetings with former foster youth. Emancipation Coaches are individuals

who work with youth involved with ILP at RCC. They are
accessible to youth until the age of twenty-one years
old. Access to the youth was approved by the RCC-ILP
Director, therefore he was aware a study would be
conducted through their program. All participants were
promised confidentiality, were made aware that they could
discontinue their participation at any time, and signed a
consent form indicating they were at least 18 years of
age or older and had emancipated from foster care.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected by distributing short surveys to
former foster youth participating at RCC-ILP and each
participant was asked to mark a consent form. The survey
began by gathering demographic information such as age
and whether or not they emancipated from foster care. The
survey then asked about their own spiritual beliefs
including, "Do you believe in God/Creator/Higher Power?"
In order to gather information on former foster youth's
current source of motivation, the following question was
asked, "Do your own spiritual beliefs help keep you
motivated to achieve your life goals?"

Information pertaining to the types of spiritual activities they participated while in foster care was included in the survey and was followed by the question of, "Were there any of the above activities that you would have liked to participate in, but couldn't?"; and "If yes, which ones and why couldn't you participate?" It was anticipated that external barriers such as lack of transportation, resources or an overall lack of support from their social worker and/or foster parents would be reasons as to why they could not participate in activities they were interested in. Further questions pertaining to what activities the participants currently used to cope with difficult situations was asked to further explore coping strategies.

An identified strength to this type of data collection method is that questions were answered in a concise manner. Due to a moderate amount of surveys collected, a limitation is that the results may not be generalized to the larger population of foster youth.

Procedures

Riverside Community College's Director of the Independent Living Program was contacted to discuss how

this research method could be reasonably implemented. The

Director ensured confidentiality of participants and gave

permission to have Emancipation Coaches distribute the

surveys. As the researcher was an employee of Riverside

County Department of Public Social Services Independent

Living Program, the researcher did not distribute or

conduct the data collection portion of the study. This

was due to issues related to confidentiality as the

researcher may have come in contact with former clients.

Therefore, four Emancipation Coaches were asked to

conduct the data collection portion of this study. Time

needed for each participant to complete the survey did

not exceed fifteen minutes. The researcher collected

completed surveys from the Emancipation Coaches over the

course of three months.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and

confidentiality was ensured by excluding any identifying

information throughout the study. Participants were asked

to mark the consent form (Appendix B) using an "X" to

indicate they understand the purpose of the study and

that their participation was voluntary. Participants were

able to terminate their participation in the study at any time and a debriefing statement was given to each participant. In addition, data was kept in a secure location at all times to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data from surveys were put into an SPSS data file and coded for statistical analysis. All responses were assigned a numerical value and frequency analyses were performed for each survey item. Frequency analyses were used to see how many youth reported spirituality as an important part of their lives; to determine what their coping skills were; to identify what spiritual activities they participated in while in care; and in what ways did foster parents and/or social workers supported them spiritually.

A bivariate analysis using Pearson's chi square test of independence was used to determine if the rate of spirituality was associated with gender, coping, participation in spiritual activities or having a meaningful conversation with foster parents and/or social workers. To determine rates of spirituality among youth who participated in spiritual activities while in care

versus youth who did not participate in any spiritual activities while in care, an ANOVA was used to compare the two groups.

It was predicted that youth who reported using spirituality as a way to cope, would lead to a higher number of youth participate in spiritual activities. It was also predicted that the data analysis method would demonstrate a positive relationship between the use of spirituality as a way to cope. In addition, it was predicted that higher rates of spirituality would be associated with the support they received from social workers and foster parents. Support from social workers and foster parents includes inquiring about their spirituality and/or ensuring they participated in spiritual activities while in care.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used in order to conduct the study. This chapter included information about the study design including sampling, data collection, procedures, and an explanation of why the survey method was utilized. Topics related to the protection of human rights including confidentiality and

finally, an explanation as to data analysis procedures

were also discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter outlines results of the quantitative
research study performed in an attempt to discover the
role of spirituality in the lives of former foster youth,
whether or not they participated in spiritual activities
while in care, and whether or not social worker's and/or
foster parents supported their spiritual development. The
relationships between rates of spirituality and gender,
coping, participation in spiritual activities and
meaningful conversations with foster parents and/or
social workers were examined. Data were obtained through
self-administered questionnaires given to former foster
youth participating in Riverside Community College's
Independent Living Program.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographics

The participants chosen for this study were former
foster youth, 18 to 21 years of age, who are receiving
ILP services. The number of youth who participated in the

study totaled 51 participants: 24 (47%) participants were

male and 27 (53%) were female.

The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 21

years old. The average age of the participants was 19.22
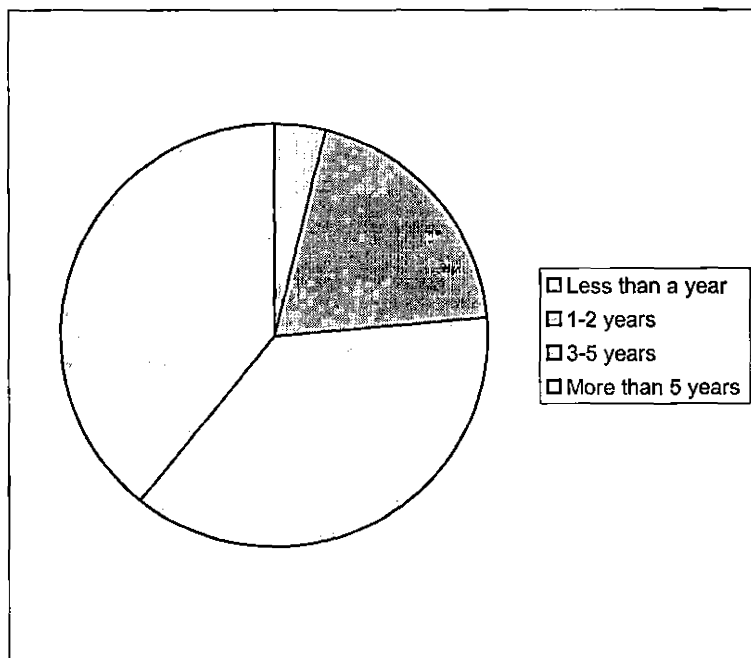
years of age.

Figure 1. Time Spent in Foster Care

There were four categories provided for the former

foster youth to choose from regarding how much time they

spent in foster care. From such categories, 2(4%)

participants spent less than one year in foster care,

10(20%) spent one to two years in foster care, 19(37%)

spent three to five years in foster care, and 20(39%)

spent more than five years in foster care. Therefore,

most of the youth included in this study spent more than
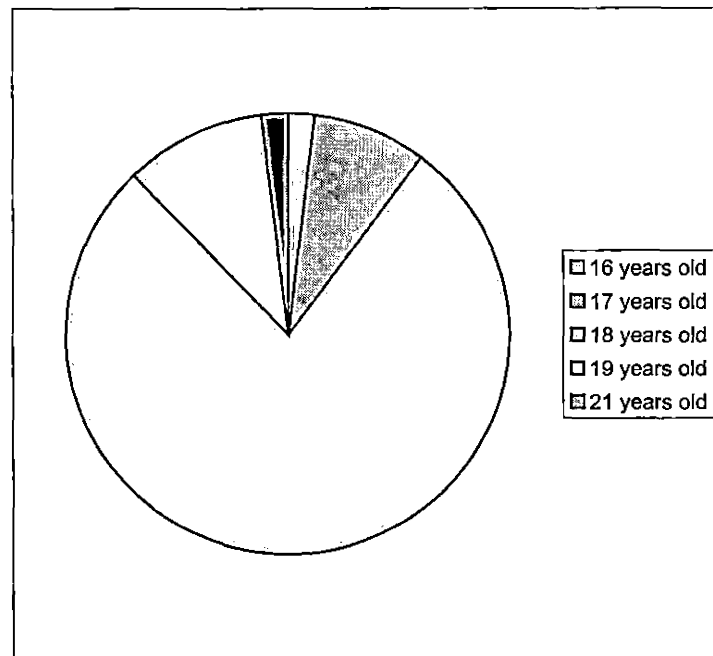
5 years in foster care.

Figure 2. Age Youth Exited Foster Care

There were five categories provided for the youth to

choose from regarding at what age they exited foster

care. From such categories, 1(2%) reported leaving foster

care at sixteen years of age, 4(8%) reported leaving

foster care at seventeen years of age, 38(75%)reported

leaving foster care at eighteen years of age, 5(10%)

reported leaving foster care at nineteen years of age, and 1(2%) reported leaving foster care at twenty-one years of age. One (2%) participant did not mark an answer. Therefore, most (75%) of the youth included in this study exited foster care at eighteen years of age.

Survey

The survey responses were analyzed utilizing quantitative procedures for nominal variables. Frequencies and bivariate analyses were used to examine various aspects of a former foster youth's spirituality. The survey was conceptualized into four distinct categories: role of spirituality in their lives; spiritual activities; coping skills; and support from social workers and/or foster parents. Chi-square tests of independence and one ANOVA were used to examine the relationship between rates of spirituality and gender, coping, participation in spiritual activities and meaningful conversations with foster parents and/or social workers.

Table 1. Spirituality in the Lives of Former Foster Youth

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Do you believe in God/Creator/Higher Power?		
Yes	43	84.3
No	2	3.9
I don't know	6	11.8
Do you consider yourself spiritual?		
Yes	33	64.7
No	13	25.5
I don't know	5	9.8
Do you believe your own spirituality helps keep you motivated to achieve your life goals?		
Yes	26	51
Sometimes	19	37.3
No	3	5.9
I don't know	3	5.9

Results indicate (Table 1) that most (84.3%) of the participant's believe in God/Creator/Higher Power, with more than half (64.7%) reporting they considered themselves spiritual. Half (51%) reported their spiritual beliefs helped them achieve their life goals. While one in three (37.3%) reported that sometimes their own spirituality helped them achieve life goals. Therefore,

it appears spirituality does play a positive role in the lives of former foster youth included in this study.

A bivariate analysis using Pearson's chi square test of independence was run indicating that gender was not significantly associated (p < 0.81) with whether participants report spirituality helping them achieve life goals or not (χ^2 = 0.97, df = 3, p = 0.81).

Table 2. Coping

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Spend time alone		
Participated	19	62.7
Did not participate	32	37.3
Pray		
Participated	23	45.1
Did not participate	28	54.9
Share the problem with someone		
Participated	27	52.9
Did not participate	24	47.1
Write in a journal or diary		
Participated	12	23.5
Did not participate	39	76.5
Do something creative		
Participated	15	29.4
Did not participate	36	70.6
Exercise		
Participated	17	33.3
Did not participate	34	66.7

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Ignore it		
Participated	13	25.5
Did not participate	38	74.5
Ask a spiritual/religious leader for advice		
Participated	13	25.5
Did not participate	38	74.5
Not eat enough		
Participated	5	9.8
Did not participate	46	90.2
Eat too much		
Participated	7	13.7
Did not participate	44	86.3
Meditate		
Participated	5	9.8
Did not participate	46	90.2
Get aggressive		
Participated	5	9.8
Did not participate	46	90.2
Use alcohol or drugs		
Participated	7	13.7
Did not participate	44	86.3
Hurt myself in some way		
Participated	2	3.9
Did not participate	49	96.1
Other		
Participated	4	7.8
Did not participate	47	92.2
None of the above		
Participated	0	0
Did not participate	51	100

Results indicate (Table 2) that participants utilized different coping mechanisms when something bad or tragic happened. The most common coping mechanisms used was spending time alone, sharing the problem with someone, and praying. The least common coping mechanism used was hurting themselves in some way, meditating, and getting aggressive.

This study also examined whether one's belief that their own spirituality helped them achieve life goals was associated coping skills, both positive and negative. Based on what coping skills the participants reported, they were separated into groups considered "positive copers" and "negative copers". A disclosure of just one negative coping skill from a participant put them in the "negative copers" group. The Pearson's chi square test of independence indicated that coping style or behavior was not significantly associated with higher rates of participants reporting that spirituality helped them achieve life goals (χ^2 = 6.05, df = 3, p = 0.11).

Table 3. Number of Spiritual Activities Youth

Participated in While in Care

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
0	3	5.8
1-3	26	50.9
4-7	18	35.2
8 or more	4	7.8

Table 4. Activities Participated in While in Foster Care

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Spend time with people who share your spiritual views		
Participated	19	62.7
Did not participate	32	37.3
Attend spiritual classes, workshops, or retreats		
Participated	9	17.6
Did not participate	42	82.4
Go to church		
Participated	33	64.7
Did not participate	18	35.3

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Talk about religion or spirituality with adults		
Participated	19	37.3
Did not participate	32	62.7
Explore spirituality online		
Participated	3	5.9
Did not participate	43	94.1
Help friends with personal problems		
Participated	33	64.7
Did not participate	18	35.3
Participate in a clothing or food drive		
Participated	10	19.6
Did not participate	41	80.4
Donate to charity		
Participated	5	9.8
Did not participate	46	90.2
Pray		
Participated	22	43.1
Did not participate	29	56.9
Worship with a community of people who have similar beliefs		
Participated	9	17.6
Did not participate	42	82.4
Being artistic or creative		
Participated	16	31.4
Did not participate	35	68.6
Meditate		
Participated	6	11.8
Did not participate	45	88.2

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Martial arts		
Participated	4	7.8
Did not participate	47	92.2
Drumming		
Participated	2	3.9
Did not participate	49	96.1
Chanting		
Participated	0	0
Did not participate	51	100
Guided visualization/imagery		
Participated	1	2
Did not participate	50	98
Yoga		
Participated	3	5.9
Did not participate	48	94.1

Results indicated (Table 3) that most former foster youth participated in some spiritual activities. Half (51%) of the former foster youth surveyed participated in at least 1-3 spiritual activities while in care; 35% participated in 4-7 spiritual activities while in care; and 8% participated in more than 8 spiritual activities while in care. Only a small percentage (5.8%) did not participate in any spiritual activities while in care. As shown on Table 4, the most common spiritual activities reported were going to church, helping friends with

personal problems, and spending time with people who shared their spiritual views. Other common spiritual activities youth participated in was talking about religion/ spirituality with adults, participating in clothing or food drives, and being artistic or creative.

Participants were also asked what activities they would have liked to participate in while in foster care, but could not. Ten participants answered this question and reported the following activities: attend camps, attend donations and food drives for others, go to church, go to bible study, learn mixed martial arts, attend school fieldtrips, attend sleepovers with friends, spend quality time with family, talk on the phone with friends/family, spend time at night with friends and watch television.

A one-way ANOVA was used to test the difference between respondents who participated in spiritual activities and those that did not. This analysis was intended to determine if participating in spiritual activities was associated with a higher rate of respondents who report their own spirituality helps them achieve life goals. The ANOVA analysis indicated that respondents' perception that spirituality helped them

achieve their life goals did not differ based on their

level of participation in spiritual activities. In other

words, irrespective of whether the person participated in

spiritual activities, having spiritual beliefs by itself

is perceived as contributing to goal achievement,

F (3, 47) = 1.89, p = 0.15.

Table 5. Support from Social Workers and Foster Parents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
While in foster care, did anyone have a meaningful conversation with you about your own spiritual beliefs?		
Yes	23	45.1
No	22	43.1
I don't know	6	11.8
While in foster care, were you placed in a foster home(s) that shared the same spiritual beliefs as you?		
Yes	17	33.3
Sometimes	11	21.6
No	16	31.4
I don't know	7	13.7
While in foster care, were you transported to any of the activities listed in question number 5?		
Yes	23	45.1
Sometimes	14	27.5
No	9	17.6
I don't know	4	7.8

Results indicated (Table 5) that about half of the former foster youth included in this study reported that someone had a meaningful conversation with them about their spiritual beliefs. Less than half (33.3 %) of the former foster youth reported they were placed in a foster home that shared their same spiritual beliefs and about half (45.1%) of the former foster youth reported they were transported to the spiritual activities they participated in.

Table 6. Participants who Reported had a Meaningful Conversation with them About their Own Spiritual Beliefs

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Foster Parent	18	35.29
Friend	14	27.45
Church member	9	17.65
Legal Guardian	5	9.8
Teacher	5	9.8
Group Home Staff	5	9.8
Social Worker	3	5.8
Biological Parent	3	5.8
Adoptive Parent	1	1.9
Other	1	1.9

Among those who reported that someone had a meaningful conversation with them about their own spiritual beliefs, foster parents, friends, and church members were reported the most frequent. Social workers were one of the individuals reported the least. Therefore, it appears that foster parents, friends, and church members are individuals who had the most meaningful conversations about spirituality with them. Pearson's chi square score (χ^2 = 11.02, df = 6, p < 0.09) indicated that meaningful conversations with a foster parent/social worker was not significantly associated with higher rates of participants reporting spirituality helped them achieve life goals.

Summary

As predicted, results of this study revealed that spirituality does play a role in the lives of former foster youth. Former foster youth included in the study participated in some spiritual activities during foster care, but reported several activities they wished they could have participated in, but could not. Some participants (5.8%) reported their foster parent and/or social worker had meaningful conversations with them.

Friends and church members were found to be the most
common individuals to have meaningful conversations with
them about spirituality. Results also revealed the
following: males and females did not differ when it came
to whether or not participants felt spirituality helped
them achieve their life goals; whether or not one felt
their spirituality helped them achieve life goals did not
make a difference on how they coped; the number of
spiritual activities one participated in while in foster
care did not appear to influence whether or not they felt
their own spirituality helped them achieve their life
goals; whether or not one had a meaningful conversation
with a social worker and/or foster parent did not have an
effect on whether or not they felt their own spirituality
helped them achieve their life goals. Therefore, the
results did not support this study's predictions
regarding the influence one's spirituality had on other
variables. However, it should be noted that the results
may be affected by a small sample size and little
variance between comparative groups.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

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Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this study

and describes how the findings relate to existing

literature regarding spirituality among foster youth. It

discusses limitations of the study and ultimately

discusses what it implies for social work practice,

policy, and research.

Discussion

The objective of this study primarily, was to find

out if former foster youth incorporated spirituality into

their daily lives and if their own spirituality is a

source of strength for them. It also attempted to find

out what spiritual activities they participated in while

in foster care and whether or not their spiritual journey

was supported by their social workers and/or foster

parents. In addition, this study found out whether or not

one's belief about their own spirituality helping them

achieve life goals was related to more positive coping

skills, whether it related to an increased participation

in spiritual activities, or whether it related to a

higher number of social workers and/or foster parents having meaningful conversations with youth regarding spirituality.

This study confirmed that yes, former foster youth incorporated spirituality into their daily lives. They believed in God, a Creator and/or a Higher Power and many of them considered themselves spiritual. Half of the participants reported their own spirituality helped keep them motivated to achieve their life goals while a little less than half reported that "sometimes" spirituality helped them. Overall, it can be said that a majority of participants felt their own spirituality helped them achieve their life goals. What this indicates is that spirituality can be considered a source of strength for many foster youth and child welfare workers should build upon it so it may be used as a resource to help them achieve their life goals.

This study also found that a majority of youth report participating in at least one spiritual activity while in foster care with the following activities being the most common: going to church, helping friends with personal problems and spending time with people who shared their spiritual views. Therefore, this study found

that youth did have some spiritual outlets while in foster care. This finding is somewhat consistent with research by DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) who found that spirituality played a role in the lives of foster youth, but they had few spiritual outlets while in foster care. Youth included in this study were then asked what spiritual activities they would have liked to participate in, but could not. Participants reported they would have liked to participate in donations and food drives for others, go to church, go to bible study and spend quality time with family. This indicates that although a little more than half of the youth had some spiritual outlets, there was still a number of spiritual activities participants would have like to do while in foster care, but could not. This should be seriously considered by the field of child welfare as Wilson (2002) found that youth benefited from participating in spiritual activities such as meditation, yoga, the arts, prayer, and bible study.

Considering how the development of their spirituality was supported while in foster care, this study found that less than half of the participants report someone having a meaningful conversation with them about spirituality. One-third of the participants report

being placed in a foster home that shared their same spiritual beliefs and less than half of the participants report being transported to spiritual activities they participated in. Therefore, this indicates that foster parents and/or social workers could get more involved when it comes to supporting the spiritual development of the youth they work with.

Participants who reported having a meaningful conversation with someone about spirituality, more than half of them report that it was their foster parent who did so. Although friends and church members were not reported as frequently as foster parents, friends, guardians, biological parents, and church members together can be considered a youth's extended support system. When you consider the aforementioned individuals as an extended support system, one may notice that extended support systems or individuals outside of the foster care system did play a significant role. Only three participants report that their social worker was someone who had a meaningful conversation with them about spirituality. This could be due to the secular nature of social work which may lead to social workers feeling uncomfortable discussing a topic such as spirituality

(Heyman, Buchanan, Marlowe, & Sealy, 2006). They may not feel comfortable discussing spirituality with their client because they may lack knowledge about spirituality and may not have training in how to do so (Sheridan et al., 1992).

Participants were also asked about what coping skills they utilized when something bad or tragic happened. This study found that the most common coping skill was spending time alone and sharing the problem with someone. Very few participants report using coping skills of spiritual essence such as asking a spiritual leader for advice, prayer, or meditation when something bad or tragic happened. Since a large amount of participants in this study reported that spirituality plays a role in their life, it was surprising to see that very few, if any, utilized coping skills of spiritual essence to help them cope. This may indicate that although foster youth consider themselves spiritual, they are not learning how to use it as source of strength and tool for coping. It could be that although foster youth consider themselves spiritual, foster parents and/or social workers should do more to show foster youth how

spirituality can be used as a source of strength during difficult life situations.

This study also sought to find out if participation in spiritual activities or having meaningful conversations with others about spirituality influenced a participant's perception of spirituality helping them achieve life goals. This study found that each did not make a difference. This may indicate that the link between spirituality and goal achievement is strongly innate in nature. One's perception of their own spirituality helping them achieve life goals may be internally driven and not necessarily driven by external factors such as participation in spiritual activities or having meaningful conversations about spirituality with other people.

One possible explanation may be related to the length of time respondents spent in foster care and their age. 22% of the respondents spent less than two years in foster care and most of them are teens, therefore they may have developed most of their spiritual beliefs before entering foster care. This would support James Fowler (1981) who proposes that that foundation of one's spirituality is developed during the early stages of

life. He explains that the core of one's spirituality lies within the attachment they have with a primary caregiver. This attachment then directly influences one's perception of where they belong in the world and what their purpose is. That may be why this study suggests that the perception of one's spirituality helping them achieve life goals is more innate, rather than driven by external factors. It could be that respondents developed most of their spiritual beliefs before they entered foster care and the experiences they had while in foster care, which may include participating in spiritual activities and having meaningful conversations with others about spirituality, may not have had a significant influence on them.

<center>Limitations</center>

There were several limitations identified in this research study. First, the sample size was not large enough to generalize to the entire population of former foster youth. This researcher preferred a larger sample size, however due to a lack of time and a lack of access to former foster youth, the final sample size was smaller than anticipated. Second, the sample also lacked in

variety. All of the participants included are participating in Riverside Community College's Independent Living Program and one can only imagine how results may change if former foster youth involved in less desirable situations such as prison, unemployment or homelessness were included in the study. Their experiences and worldviews may significantly change the data collected. In addition, this study has limited generalizability. All of the participants are young adults, therefore the results are not representative to the entire child welfare population.

In addition, one part of this study examined whether one's belief that their own spirituality helped them achieve life goals was associated coping skills, both positive and negative. Based on what coping skills the participants reported, they were separated into groups considered "positive copers" and "negative copers". A disclosure of just one negative coping skill from a participant put them in the "negative copers" group. Very few participants included in this study ended up being identified as a "negative coper", while a larger portion of participants were identified as "positive copers". Therefore there was not enough "negative copers" to

adequately compare to "positive copers" and this is
believed to affect the data analysis results. It is
believed that if the aforementioned limitations were
addressed, this study may have had more significant
findings.

<div align="center">

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

</div>

This study showed that spirituality does play a role
in the lives of foster youth and they may greatly benefit
from support in developing this aspect of themselves.
Support from their foster parents and social workers
would be ideal. Spirituality may improve coping skills
which may lead to better outcomes and this can only be
done if spirituality is included in social work practice.

It will be imperative to ensure social work students
are offered courses where they will learn about
spirituality and how it can be utilized as a source of
strength for clients. It will be important to ensure
social work students learn about a young person's
spiritual development and how it plays a role in them
becoming a successful adult. Given the secular nature of
child welfare services, assessing, discussing, or
supporting a youth's spirituality may make social workers

feel uncomfortable. Training social workers and requiring courses in spirituality may help address this problem. This is supported by Heyman, Buchanan, Marlowe, and Sealy (2006) who found that social workers were more likely to have a positive attitude about spirituality if they had taken a course in spiritual development. If social workers do not prioritize the incorporation of spirituality in social work practice, they may be ignoring a significant aspect of their client's overall well-being.

Excluding spirituality in social work practice may also increase the chances of foster youth coming to a spiritual void as DiLorenzo and Nix-Early (2004) suggest. This study also shines light on the need to incorporate spirituality during the assessment and intervention phase of social work practice. In doing so, social workers will be truly assessing the client as a "whole person" which is considered "best practice".

Not only do studies such as this one provide more knowledge on how to improve "best practice," it is expected to encourage policymakers to ensure that the spiritual dimension of child welfare clients is not ignored. Just as lifelong connections have been

incorporated into policy due to a wealth of research which found better outcomes for foster youth when they have a positive relationship with a caring adult, it is hoped that research regarding foster youth's spirituality will do the same. If a wealth of knowledge addressing spirituality in social work can be accumulated, the need for child welfare workers to support and purposefully inquire about spirituality will become policy.

As previously mentioned, this study found that many youth reported spirituality being a part of their lives, but very few, if any, utilized coping skills of spiritual essence to deal with difficult situations. Although the results cannot be generalized towards the entire · population of former foster youth, it may be beneficial to identify foster youth who do use coping skills such as prayer, asking a spiritual leader for advice, or meditation and find out how they developed those skills. Did they learn from their biological families, foster parents, church members, friends, or social workers?

This study also found that many youth attended church, but few report their foster parents and/or social workers transported them to this spiritual activity. It will be beneficial to identify youth who are

participating in spiritual activities and find out who is supporting them in their endeavors. This study also identified spiritual activities foster youth would have like to participate in, but could not. It would be useful to find out more as to why they could not participate so that the reported issues can be addressed.

Overall, spirituality exists; it matters and further research on the human dimension of spirituality is needed. More research is needed in order for social work practice to improve and for policy to include the spiritual dimension of a client in assessment and intervention. Increasing the body of knowledge about the spiritual dimension of clients will improve child welfare as a whole.

Conclusions

At the 2010 ILP Youth Summit this researcher observed current foster youth ask former foster youth what kept them motivated and former foster youth confidently shared that it was their own spirituality that helped keep them motivated to reach their life goals. It was this observation that inspired this researcher to conduct a research project such as this

one. This study found that spirituality did play an important role in the lives of foster youth, but like other studies done about spirituality of foster youth discovered that so much more has yet to be discovered about the role spirituality plays in their lives. Further studies about spirituality among foster youth are needed in order for social work practice to improve which will ultimately lead to more support for foster youth becoming successful adults.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY

The survey in which you are being asked to complete is designed to explore spirituality of former foster youth. It is also designed to find out whether or not your spirituality was inquired about, supported, or encouraged while you were in foster care.

Before completing this survey it is important to understand the difference between religion and spirituality. Remember, religion "centers on a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of people" for example, the Christian religion or the Buddhist religion. Spirituality, on the other hand, relates to the spirit or essential essence of humanity. It includes "having a belief in a higher power; developing the capacity to form meaningful relationships; developing a moral compass; one's personal capacity to overcoming major challenges, and possessing personal hope for the future." It is said that all human beings have a spiritual dimension. Please note, people who are religious are generally spiritual as well, but people who are spiritual do not necessarily have to be religious.

Instructions: Please mark the appropriate box next to you answer choice with an "x". Please answer all of the following questions to the best of your ability.

Demographics

Age:
- ☐ 18 years old
- ☐ 19 years old
- ☐ 20 years old
- ☐ 21 years old

Gender:
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Length of time spent in foster care:
- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ More than 5 years

Did you emancipate from foster care:
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Survey Questions

1. Do you believe in God/Creator/Higher Power?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ I don't know

2. Do you consider yourself spiritual?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ I don't know

3. Do you believe your own spirituality helps keep you motivated to achieve your life goals?:
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ No
   ☐ I don't know

4. When something bad or tragic happens, what do you do to cope? Check all that apply:
   ☐ Spend time alone'
   ☐ Pray
   ☐ Share the problem with someone
   ☐ Write in a journal or diary
   ☐ Do something creative
   ☐ Exercise
   ☐ Ignore it
   ☐ Ask a spiritual/religious leader for advice
   ☐ Not eat enough
   ☐ Eat too much
   ☐ Meditate
   ☐ Get aggressive
   ☐ Use alcohol or drugs
   ☐ Hurt myself in some way
   ☐ Other: _____
   ☐ None of the above

5. Did you do any of the following activities while in foster care? Check all that apply:
- ☐ Spend time with people who share your spiritual views
- ☐ Attend spiritual classes, workshops, or retreats
- ☐ Go to church
- ☐ Talk about religion or spirituality with adults
- ☐ Explore spirituality online
- ☐ Help friends with personal problems
- ☐ Participate in clothing or food drives
- ☐ Donate to charity
- ☐ Pray
- ☐ Worship with a community of people who have similar beliefs?
- ☐ Being artistic or creative (music, poetry, drawing, painting, dancing)
- ☐ Meditate
- ☐ Martial arts
- ☐ Drumming
- ☐ Chanting
- ☐ Guided visualization/imagery
- ☐ Yoga

6. Were there any activities in question number 5 that you would have liked to do while in foster care, but couldn't?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

If yes, which ones and why couldn't you participate? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. While in foster care, did anyone have a meaningful conversation with you about your own spiritual beliefs?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ I don't know

8. If yes, then who? Check all that apply:
   ☐ Foster parent
   ☐ Social worker
   ☐ Biological Parents
   ☐ Adoptive Parents
   ☐ Legal Guardians
   ☐ Group Home Staff
   ☐ Teacher
   ☐ CASA
   ☐ Friend
   ☐ Church members
   ☐ Other: _____

9. While in foster care, were you placed in a foster home(s) that shared the same spiritual beliefs as you?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ I don't know

10. While in foster care, were you transported to any of the activities listed in
   · question number 5?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ I don't know

Developed by Jessica A. Manio

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

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INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to explore spirituality of former foster youth. It is also designed to find out whether or not your spirituality was inquired about, supported, or encouraged while in foster care. This study is being conducted by Jessica A. Huitrado-Manio under the supervision of Jennifer Pabustan Claar, Lecturer in Social Work. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Subcommittee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to respond to a structured list of questions. The process should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. All of your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher. Your name will not be reported with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. You may review the group results of this study on completion after September, 2011 at the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you complete the study you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail.

This study may have limited benefit to you, however it may help you understand spirituality and how it may play a role in your life. This study may initiate thoughts about your own spirituality that you may not have considered before. This study also gives you an opportunity to share your experiences while in foster care.

There are minimal foreseeable risks to you by participating in the study. The questions you are asked may leave you feeling some discomfort due to the personal nature of the questions, therefore you may withdraw from this study at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledged that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that the research will use an audio recorder during the interview, that I am at least 18 years of age and am no longer in foster care.

_____   _____

Place a Mark Above   Today's Date

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study you have just completed was designed to investigate the spiritual lives of former foster youth and to find out whether or not foster parents and social workers inquired about, supported, or encouraged your spiritual self while in foster care. this study contributes to the field of social work because if gives an opportunity for former foster youth to share their opinion about what in which child welfare agencies can do to better support the spiritual journeys of youth in their care.

Thank you for your participation and or not discussing the content of this study with other participants. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507. If you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this study, please contact the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino after September 2011.

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