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## **An assessment of foster youth and the California High School Exit Exam**

Michael Lynn Edwards Jr.

Brandon Bowman Thayn

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AN ASSESSMENT OF FOSTER YOUTH AND THE  
CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM

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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  
Michael Lynn Edwards Junior

Brandon Bowman Thayn

June 2007

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Approved by:

  
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## ABSTRACT

Low educational attainment among foster youth is not easily explained by a single cause. Instead, a variety of interrelated factors affect a foster child's school performance. In evaluating school performance, this study examined possible variables that may contribute to a foster child's passing or failing of the California high school exit exam. This study utilized a secondary data analysis and employed an availability sample of 91 case records from the County of Riverside Department of Children's Services. Based on correlation tests, four variables seemed to have a significant association to passing the exit exam. These included 1) number of placements, 2) types of substantiated abuse, 3) number of school placements, and 4) credits completed at the time of examination. Identifying such variables can alert social workers of profiles typical of clients' who are at-risk of not achieving a score on their exit exam that would allow them to receive a high school diploma. Further studies need to be done to continually assess what factors relate to foster children not succeeding academically at the same rate as non-foster children.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... iv

LIST OF TABLES ..... viii

LIST OF FIGURES ..... ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

    Problem Statement ..... 1

    Purpose of the Study ..... 4

    Significance of the Project for Social Work  
    Practice ..... 6

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

    Introduction ..... 9

    Literature Review ..... 9

    Dependent Variable (California High School  
    Exit Exam) ..... 15

    Theories Guiding Conceptualization ..... 23

    Summary ..... 25

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

    Introduction ..... 26

    Study Design ..... 26

    Sampling ..... 28

    Data Collection and Instruments ..... 29

    Procedures ..... 30

    Protection of Human Subjects ..... 32

    Data Analysis ..... 33

Summary .....	34
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Descriptive Statistics .....	36
Correlations .....	43
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION .....	45
Ethnicity .....	47
Gender .....	48
Age and Number of School Placements .....	49
Months in Foster Care .....	50
Months in Current Placement .....	51
Number of Placements .....	51
Substantiated Types of Abuse .....	53
Placement Type .....	54
Credits Completed at Exam Date .....	55
Number of Previous Referrals .....	57
Multiple Substantiated Types of Abuse .....	57
Limitations of this Study .....	58
Improvements for Study .....	60
Implications to Social Work Practice .....	60
APPENDIX: DATA EXTRACTION FORM .....	64
REFERENCES .....	66
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE .....	69



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics from the Data  
Extracted from 91 Case Files of Foster  
Youth in Riverside County ..... 37

Table 2. Results of the Chi-square Tests on the  
Independent Variables Compared to the  
Passing of the Exit Exam ..... 42

Table 3. Results from Pearson Correlation Tests  
Relating Independent Variables Included  
in this Study to the Passing of the  
California High School Exit Exam ..... 44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentage of Individuals Representing  
the Ethnicities Studied Passing Both  
Sections of the California High School  
Exit Exam ..... 38

Figure 2. Types of Abuse Experienced by  
Individuals in the Study ..... 39

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Completion of at least a high school level education is critical to success in today's society. Without a high school diploma, individuals are severely restricted in the types of jobs and careers that are available to them. Furthermore, individuals who did not graduate from high school earn on average less than half the income of high school graduates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). This puts these individuals severely at risk for life-long poverty. Also, these problems are often cyclical in nature: youth who drop-out of high school will likely be of a lower socio-economic status, which, in turn, is a risk factor for their children in dropping out of high school (Alexander et al., 1997).

Sadly, foster children in particular are often hindered when trying to complete their primary education due to a variety of psychological, economical, and other disruptive factors. Recent studies show that approximately half of youth in the foster care system do not complete high school and less than ten percent go on

to college (California Department of Social Services Fact Sheet 2006). These numbers are in stark contrast to the population as a whole: in 2003, the percentage of California's teens who were drop outs was estimated at only 7% (Kids Count Census, 2003). This alarming discrepancy suggests that factors unique or related to life as a foster child directly affect their education. Clearly, steps must be taken to remedy this issue.

This study attempts to identify some of the factors that influence the success or failure of foster children when it comes to completing their primary education. As factors are identified, appropriate strategies can be employed to facilitate the educational achievement of foster children.

Past research efforts have helped to identify certain variables that affect educational attainment, and many of these variables were included in this study. Previously identified variables include: the number of placements a foster child has been in, the types of abuse the child has endured, the number of school changes the foster child has had (Zetlin, Weinburg, & Shea, 2006; Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

This study examines twelve independent variables with respect to the success or failure of the California High School Exit Exam. They include: age, gender, ethnicity, months in foster care, months in current placement, number of placements, types of substantiated abuse, whether or not there were multiple types of substantiated abuse, number of school placements, placement type, number of previous referrals, and credits completed.

This study is important because there is very limited information on how foster children are performing on the California High School Exit Exam. Also, this study has identified specific factors that may contribute to foster children passing or failing the exam and this study has also suggested which variables do not appear to play a role in the passing or failing of the exit exam. Knowing what particular factors impact passing and failing of the CAHSEE could be helpful to professionals in designing programs and interventions for improving pass rates of foster youth on the CAHSEE.

## Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this study was to identify possible variables that may contribute to a foster child's passing or failing of the California high school exit exam.

Identifying such variables can alert social workers of profiles typical to clients at-risk of not achieving a sufficient score on their exit exam, and thereby not graduating from high school. While past studies such as Emerson and Lovitt (2003) have addressed poor academic performance and high drop-out rates of foster youth, no studies as of yet have addressed variables that may influence foster children and their success on the high school exit exam. However, performance on the exit exam is critical because it represents the final hurdle to be crossed in earning a diploma.

Many of the twelve aforementioned independent variables have been examined in similar contexts in other studies. In particular, it is known that many of the youth in the foster care system have an extensive history of abuse and neglect (Holand & Gorey, 2004). And, writers such as Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kimm, (2004); Emerson and Lovett, 2003) noted that multiple school placements are extremely common among foster children. Each of these

factors has the potential to affect whether or not a child is equipped to pass the California exit exam.

This study examines secondary data supplied through the County of Riverside, Department Public Social Services. In this study, case files of clients placed in foster care were examined with respect to each of the independent variables mentioned in the Problem Statement. Once the data was collected, the variables were analyzed to assess if there were significant correlations between the independent and the dependent variables. Strong correlations were suggestive of recurrent patterns in the data. These strong patterns were indicative of trends that could then be addressed by the formulation and/or improvement of existing policies and practices.

Examining secondary data was a cost-effective method in that this research project did not need outside funding in order to be conducted. Also, it was much more feasible to collect secondary data versus primary data due to the limited amount of time available for completing this study.

This study directly addresses issues related to foster children of high school age within the County of Riverside, making the findings of this study potentially

valuable to the Department of Public Social Services and specifically to the Department of Children Services. Also, the findings might be useful to other counties whose foster youth are struggling to pass the CAHSEE.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Concern about foster youth and their educational attainment is an emerging issue among those in the social work and educational fields. Professionals from many different fields might be able to use the findings in this study to pinpoint educational concerns. Educators may also find this information useful because they could become better equipped to deal with the unique needs of their students in the foster care system. The Department of Children Services (DCS) could benefit from a study such as this one because they may learn valuable insights concerning factors that affect the educational attainment of local children in their system. Social Workers in general could benefit as well, because this study could add to their knowledge-base in a way that allows them to more effectively help certain individuals on their caseloads to have success in passing the exit exam. Findings may suggest specific actions that social workers



can take to improve the chances of foster children in passing the CAHSEE so they can obtain high school diploma.

Foster parents could benefit as well, because as they become aware of these issues, they are better positioned to make positive changes to benefit their foster children's lives.

The implications of the findings from this study are potentially far-reaching. Information such as this is critical to influencing policy decisions, because it is difficult to make accurate policy decisions without empirical evidence to support claims and observations. While some steps have recently been taken in the right direction, further action is needed in order to give foster children the same educational opportunities that children from intact families enjoy.

From the perspective of the generalist model of social work practice, this study primarily focuses on the assessment of factors that promote or hinder a foster youth's success in passing the exit exam. The information gained from this study may play a large role in the future of planning, implementing, and evaluating foster children and their individual educational needs.

Because achieving a quality education is both critical and difficult for youth in foster care, research concerning these issues is necessary for the well being of children who are in the care of the state through no fault of their own. This study attempts to bring a better understanding of the factors that impede or limit foster youth from passing the California High School Exit Exam. Specifically, our research goals were to determine if there was any association with the twelve aforementioned independent variables and passing or failing of the California High School Exit Exam for youth in foster care in Riverside County.

This study is relevant to child welfare because it examines factors that potentially impede the educational attainment of foster youth. Educational attainment is extremely important and foster youth in general are clearly not attaining the education needed to secure many kinds of jobs and/or go on to college. This objective of this study was to bring to light important factors that could help to reverse that trend.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Low educational attainment among foster youth is not easily explained by a single cause. Instead, a variety of interrelated factors affect a foster child's school performance. Discussion of the relevant literature was examined in hopes to further understand some of the barriers that impede foster youth's academic achievement.

#### Literature Review

Researchers have offered an array of variables over the years leading to difficulties in the educational attainment of foster youth (Zetlin, Ceinberg, & Lauder, 2004). Alexander et al. (1997) suggested that factors relating to high school drop out could be predicted in individuals as early as the first grade. Therefore, it is critical to understand the barriers that inhibit foster youth's academic achievement.

Research findings relating the experiences of maltreatment and subsequent out of home care to difficulties in academic achievement are plentiful. According to Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006), the

trauma of abuse and neglect along with the disruption of multiple placement moves and school transfers, result in foster youth not attaining the necessary skills they need to sustain themselves as adults. In their exploratory study of four focus groups with former foster youth, these researchers found that 75% of foster youth performed below grade level, while more than 50% had been retained at least one year in school. Given that there were only four focus groups, which were not randomly selected, it would be difficult to generalize these findings beyond the population studied (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2006). However, the findings were extremely consistent with finding from earlier studies by Emerson and Lovitt (2003).

Similarly, Holland and Gorey (2004) examined relationships between a child's developmental and mental health problems, family precursors (abuse or neglect), and placement instability. The secondary data analysis of 125 foster care takers and child welfare workers showed that 85% of children had been maltreated prior to their foster placement. Nearly two-thirds (61%) had been neglected, 52% had been sexually abused, and 57% had been physically abused. Consequently, 74% of the children

placed in foster care had academic problems and 35% had two or more foster care placements. The documented perspectives of child caretakers and child welfare workers were taken as data for the study; therefore the study displayed limitations in that it only focused on individual perspectives.

Another risk factor was the elevated level of mobility that children in foster care experience (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). Using a comparative cross-sectional analysis of 120 foster youth's school records, study found that due to the high level of school mobility among foster youth their school records were often incomplete as well as difficult to access. This caused foster children to remain enrolled in classes at schools they no longer attended and receive failing grades in those classes consequently hindering them from being placed in the appropriate classes they needed at their current school.

Emerson and Lovett (2003) studied a relationship between school performance and multiple school placements and found that about 50% of foster youth changed schools at least four times after beginning their formal education. This comparative study of foster/non-foster

youth also found that children in foster care performed significantly lower on standard achievement tests in the areas of math and reading due to heightened school mobility. Martin and Jackson (2002) added that due to lack of school continuity, only 6% of their study sub-group (38 of 101 foster youth) were successful in obtaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above. Research findings on mobility were consistent among multiple studies, which demonstrated the validity of school mobility and the effect it has on educational outcomes. However, a potential limitation of this study was that it could have been biased by its sampling strategy.

Studies have shown that school mobility is often affected by placement mobility, meaning that when placements are not stable, than it is likely that school mobility increases (Evans, 2004). For example, the more often youth change placement the more likely it is they will move away from their current school or even out of their current school district. Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt (2005) employed an exploratory study of 14 foster youth, which utilized both an in depth interview technique along with a more quantitative aspect of a

self-administered survey. This study showed that the average length of time in placement was 8 years, with an average of 3 placement moves, consequently affecting academic performance. However, in a study of 392 foster youth in Arkansas, Larry (2004) indicated that although average achievement was slightly affected by placement length and movement between care placements, there was no significant affect on IQ except minimal decreases in writing skills.

In a longitudinal administrative bivariate study performed by Webster, Richard, and Needell (2000), placement instability, characterized by three or more placement changes, was studied during an eight-year period. The sample included 5,557 children in California who first entered out-of-home care between birth and six years of age. One of the variables in the study was placement type (kinship, non-kinship, institutional/residential). Results found that children in kinship care had fewer placements than youth in non-kinship type placements. Findings also showed that eight years after first entry, 71% of children in kinship care remained in their first or second placement, while only 48% of children in non-kinship care had only one to

two placements. Analysis of placement moves over time found that 30% of children in kinship care and more than 50% of the children in non-kinship care had experienced three or more placement moves (Webster, Richard, & Needell, 2000).

However, Zima et al. (2000) argued that time spent in out-of-home placement and placement instability were not directly related to academic problems. In examination of 302 children ages 6-12, 69% of them screened positive for behavioral problems, academic skills delays and/or school failure. However, studies indicated that even though the level of behavior and academic problems potentially varied across alternative types of foster care, placement characteristics were only somewhat related to these outcomes. This study resulted in mixed findings that were inconsistent with earlier studies, which may be attributed to the difference in assessment measures.

Included in numerous research findings is the viewpoint on how placement type affects educational achievement. Lelsie, Gordon, Ganger, and Gist (2002) note that there has been limited study examining placement experience and educational attainment of foster youth.



Furthermore, because of placement movements: one fifth (in a sample size of 152) dropped out of school, 33% had a reading capacity at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level, 31% demonstrated reading skills between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, 18% had a reading ability at a 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade level, while only 18% could function at a reading level equivalent to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Leslie, Gordon, Ganger, & Gist 2002).

Placement in kinship care was the only domain that increased the educational level of foster youth.

#### Dependent Variable (California High School Exit Exam)

Although much research has been done on foster youth and academic achievement, it has been conducted in terms of standardized testing scores and school grades. Many of these sentiments are echoed in other research efforts, but never has the California exit exam has not been used as a measurement tool to assess if variables' such as abuse and neglect, school mobility, placement instability, earned school credits, prior CPS referrals, and placement type correlate with foster youths school performance.

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Kim (2004) have noted that on standard achievement test, maltreated youth in foster

care performed significantly lower than non-foster youth. The study employed an educational liaison to a treatment group of 60 foster youth in contrast to 60 foster youth placed in a control group not receiving services. Significant differences in test scores for math and reading were found for the treatment group while the control group followed the typical downward trajectory that youth in foster care had previously exhibited over time.

Zetlin, Weinberg, and Shea (2006) make note that the California High School Exit Examination is perceived to be an overwhelming hurdle to many youth in foster care who are already displaying extreme complications with academic skill and current testing. As previous studies have shown, a large number of foster youth are not mastering concepts pertaining to reading or math, which leads them to perceive the exam as hopeless.

Rowe (2004) notes that the inception of a nationwide exit exam was at first constructed around minimum competency. However, these tests are currently much more difficult and are posing barriers to high school graduation, especially to those individuals in special education. Given that the majority of foster youth have

been placed in special education classifications, red flags have gone up concerning the situation. Rowe (2004) goes on to mention that special education is often not considered a pullout program, so most children with special needs are incorporated into the general classroom population. As a result, many states that give high school exit exams may be in violation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The CAHSEE was established in 1999 and administration of the test began in 2000-2001. The test evaluates English and math scores (Rowe, 2004), an area that has been highly problematic for youth in foster care. Rowe (2004) revealed that in 2001 64% of students not classified as special education passed the English arts section, while only 44% passed the mathematics portion. Significantly lower numbers of special education students passed with comparative scores of 18% and 9% respectively. According to this data, foster youth taking the California High School Exit Exam face a heightened chance of failure.

In an independent evaluation of the 2001 administration of the California High School Exit Exam, Wise, Sipes, Hars, George, Ford, and Sun (2002),

examined California's requirement for students to pass a graduation exam in mathematics and English-language arts. This administration began with the class of 2004. The test had positive and negative effects. The positive effects of the test were that students would achieve essential verbal and quantitative skills would function well in society. The negative consequences seen from administration of the test were primarily associated with the likelihood that some students would be denied diplomas.

The CAHSEE mathematics examination is made up of 80 multiple-choice questions, and the English-language arts exam consists of: 58 multiple-choice reading question, 24 multiple-choice writing questions, and 2 essay questions assessing writing skills (Wise et al., 2002). At the first stage of scoring, a raw score is computed separately for each section of the exam. For the mathematics section the raw score is the number of questions answered correctly. For the ELA, the raw score is the number of questions answered correctly plus the students score on each of the two essays. The equation for the ELA is  $.7683 * MC = 3.3750 * CR$  where MC is the number of multiple-choice items (out of 82) answered

correctly and CR (constructed response) is the sum of the two essays scores, each of which ranges from 0 to 4 in half-point increments (except that it is not possible to get a score of .05). For ELA, the weighted raw scores are rounded to whole numbers. For mathematics, the raw scores range from 0 to 80. For ELA, the maximum possible score is: maximum raw score =  $.7683 * 82 + 3.3750 * 8 = 90$ " (Wise et al., 2002 p. 21). The CAHSEE originates from the linear translation of the Rasch (one-parameter) IRT scale. The score scale ranges from 250 to 450 with 350 constituting a passing score.

Wise et al. (2002) studied a sample of 269,574 students who took the ELA portion of the exam and 312,250 students who took the mathematics portion of the exam. The students were given a self-administered questionnaire regarding: test preparation, perceived importance of the exam, expectations for graduation, and post-high school plans. Exam scores/results were also gathered from the students in the same sample group. Information was gathered by groupings related to gender, race, and disadvantaged individuals (individuals with poor economic conditions, English learners, and individuals with disabilities). Examiners found that an

estimated 42% of children taking both the math and ELA portions of the CAHSEE passed the exam. However, passing rates for students who were economically disadvantaged were considerably low at 22.7%, while students who were English learners were particularly low at 11.9% (Wise et al., 2002). The analysis found that students proficient in English passed the exam at much higher rates than those students who were English learners (Wise et al. 2002). By 2002, results showed that only 29.9% of all students in the class of 2004 had successfully passed the CAHSEE requirements, with Asian students having the highest passing rates, and only 8.1% of EL (English learners) and 6.5% of SD (students with disabilities) completing the CAHSEE requirements (Wise et al., 2002).

Study results also showed that students who had completed algebra 1 and were currently enrolled in geometry had passing rates of about 90% on the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE. Only 20% of students who were not enrolled in algebra 1 passed the CAHSEE math requirements (Wise et al., 2002). Therefore, the study showed that students, who are enrolled in the appropriate grade level and take the appropriate classes

that correspond with that grade level, have a higher likelihood of passing the exam.

In a statistical analysis of the CAHSEE examination for the County of Riverside, the California Department of Education (2006), found that in the entire academic school year of 2006, 53,273 students took the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE exam and 51,213 students took the ELA portion of the exam. Results showed that 55% of students passed the mathematics section of the CAHSEE, and 58% of the students passed the English-language arts section. It is important to note that this report displayed the percent of students who passed either the mathematics or English-language arts portion of the exam. It also represents the combined results for all exam administrations in the selected 2006 school year. This means that test takers may have taken the CAHSEE multiple times during the 2006 academic school year (California Department of Education, 2006). The report was also broken down into sub-groups of students passing the math and ELA sections of the exam which consisted of: special education (18%, 19%), English Learners (31%, 26%), re-designated fluent English proficient (72%, 80%), socio-economically disadvantaged (45%, 45%), and not

socio-economically disadvantaged (68%, 74%) respectively. One of the general groupings of the analysis was grade level, which was broken down into sub-sections of 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, but also included adult students and unknown statistical data for grade level. However, there was no data available for adult students or students in unknown grade levels. All participants were either classified as enrolled in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

In another independent evaluation of the CAHSEE (year 5 evaluation) conducted by Wise, Becker, Harris, Sun, Wang, and Brown (2004), 884,204 students (425,066 from 2005 and 459,138 from 2006) were given a survey after completion of the CAHSEE to evaluate their reaction to the test, plans for graduation, and passing rates of the exam. According to Wise et al. (2004), the overall passing rates increased for the class of 2006 compared to the class of 2005 only after there was an adjustment to the score scale. There was an increase of about 5% in mathematics scores and 1% for scores in ELA.

Wise et al. (2004) also found that the passing rates of students who received special education services were still problematic. More than 70% of the students who received special education services had not passed either



section of the CAHSEE (Wise et al., 2004). This meant there would be a significant number of students not eligible to graduate from high school. This low pass rate also contributed to a progressive decline in student enrollment. The class of 2006 had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment of 522,108 students. By the 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, there was a 6.1% decline in enrollment, a loss of 31,894 students.

On a more positive note Wise et al. (2004) found that English learners who achieved fluency had a higher probability of passing the ELA portion of the CAHSEE, which also increased their probability of passing the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE as well.

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

This study focused on abuse and neglect, school mobility, placement instability, earned school credits, prior CPS referrals, and placement types, most of which are systems issues. Thus, systems theory and the ecological perspective of social work practice were utilized to help guide the studies conceptualization.

Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2001) show how a systems approach interprets the organization as a social system with interrelated parts, functioning in concert with each

other equitable part. The school setting was the organization in study, specifically in reference to the institution of the California High School Exit Exam. Foster youth, Foster caretakers, foster placements, social service workers, and teachers then become sub-systems, fulfilling their role in the organization as a whole. These individuals were studied in relation to the key factors mentioned under the independent variable sub-section.

The ecological perspective guided this study in looking at people within their environments. The study focused on the educational attainment of foster youth is impeded by what studies have shown to be negative variables associated with academic success. Because foster youth are exposed to abuse and neglect, experience a high degree of school and placement mobility, lack sufficient high school credits, and have varying placement types, they have become potential participants in a negative environment with educational disadvantages. The ecological perspective places emphasis on the individual and the macro systems surrounding the individual. This means that parents, parental figures, and caretakers help create an environment that can

profoundly influence the educational achievement of any child, particularly a foster child.

Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, (2001) posit that a systems approach theory and an ecological perspective are complimentary, therefore this study used both theories in an effort to focus on how systems issues, and person-in-environment factors influence the educational achievement of foster youth.

#### Summary

The foundation of this study was grounded in systems theory and ecological perspective as represented in the literature. The first sub-section emphasized the independent variables associated with foster youth and their school performance. Factors ranged from prior substantiated abuse and neglect, school mobility, placement instability, school credits at time the CAHSEE was taken, prior CPS referrals, and placement type. Similarly, the second sub-section detailed the dependent variable as a measure of educational achievement. Hopefully the knowledge acquired from this study will help enhance the educational achievement of foster youth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The following section outlines the methods used in this study. This study employs a cross-sectional quantitative design using secondary data and an availability sampling scheme to examine correlations between success or failure of foster children with the California Exit Exam and different aspects of the children's background.

#### Study Design

The specific purpose of this study was to explore factors that related to foster children in Riverside county and their failing or passing the California exit exam. The factors that were assessed were: number of placements foster children have had, types of substantiated abuse a foster child has endured, the number of school placements a foster child has had, the number of completed credits a child had at the time the CAHSEE was taken, duration of placement, and types of placement foster children have been in. The researchers hope was to find correlations that would be useful in

understanding the success or failure of foster children in the California high school exit exam. This study utilizes an analysis of secondary data from the County of Riverside, Department of Public Social Services. A secondary data analysis was the most effective and appropriate type of design for this study. Examining existing data was the most effective way in terms of time, money, and labor to assess this important question. Furthermore, the study method was less intrusive to individuals and yet may possibly provide vital knowledge to potentially many types of professionals. On the other hand, this study was limited in that there are potentially many other factors that can contribute to the success/failure of students passing the exit exam that are not addressed in this design.

As previously mentioned, this study attempts to bring a better understanding of the factors that impede or limit foster youth from passing the California exit exam. Is there any correlation with: 1) age, 2) gender, 3) ethnicity, 4) months in current placement, 5) months in foster care, 6) number of placements, 7) type of substantiated abuse, 8) whether or not their were multiple types of substantiated abuse, 9) number of

school placements, 10) placement type, 11) units completed, 12) number of previous referrals, and 13) the passing or failing of the California exit exam? For data extraction form, see Appendix.

#### Sampling

This sample included foster children between the ages of 16 to 19 years old who had taken the California high school exit exam. This sample included a total of 91 individuals from Riverside County. Selection criteria included only those individuals who were in the foster care system who were currently being served by the County of Riverside, and who had taken the high school exit exam. An availability sampling strategy was used, given that there was not a large pool of individuals to pull information from, and access to records was limited. Collection of the data took place from Jan 1, 2007 to March 31, 2007. This sample containing only foster children was important because it is known that foster children graduate less frequently than those children who are not in foster care. It is important that further knowledge is developed to eradicate this large difference. The researchers obtained approval from the

County of Riverside's Department of Public Social Services in order to obtain access to their data.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

Once permission to access records was granted, a data extraction form (see appendix) was constructed and used to obtain the desired data. This form specifically shows what information was obtained and includes important demographic data such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Also included are: 1) months in current placement, 2) months in foster care, 3) number of placements, 4) type of substantiated abuse, 5) whether or not there were multiple types of substantiated abuse, 6) number of school placements, 7) placement type, 8) units completed, 9) number of previous referrals, and 10) whether or not the individual passed or failed the mathematics and English-language Arts portions of the exit exam. For data extraction form, see Appendix.

The dependent variable was simply whether or not the individual passed or failed the California exit exam. The level of measurement for the dependent variable is nominal.

The independent variables and their level of measurements respectively are 1) age, scale 2) gender, nominal, 3) ethnicity, nominal 4) months in current placement, interval/ratio 5) months in foster care, interval/ratio 6) number of placements, interval/ratio, 7) type of substantiated abuse, nominal, 8) whether or not their were multiple types of substantiated abuse, nominal, 9) number of school placements, interval/ratio, 10) placement type, nominal, 11) units completed, interval/ratio 12) number of previous referrals, interval/ratio. The independent variables were each tested against the dependent variable: passing or failing of the California exit exam.

#### Procedures

The data for the research was gathered from existing case files from the Independent Living Program (ILP) at Riverside County. Researchers sought consultation from Crystal Shackelford (Supervisor of the Professional Intern Unit) and Kim Stark (Manager of ILP Services) in order to gather all necessary information. Furthermore, the information gathered from the ILP Department was then cross-referenced with the existing data in the Child



Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), which is the social work database for the state of California, to measure the research question. Since this research was a secondary data analysis, permission to access case records from Riverside County was solicited and granted from the Department of Public Social Services. The data collection took place within the context of the agency and was collected by Michael Edwards and Brandon Thayn, the researchers. Agency approval took a month and a half, data collection took two weeks, and data auditing took two days. This auditing process was done by re-evaluating data from the Child Welfare Systems/Case Management Systems, to ensure that data was completely and thoroughly collected to minimize error. Availability sampling was utilized as the means to collect data because the sample size was restricted to 97 participants. The final sample included a pool of 91 individual records due to six cases being excluded because of high profile status, which restricted access to records.

## Protection of Human Subjects

Though individuals were not examined in this study, all information came via case records. Records were only examined upon agency approval and researchers gathered information under the supervision the ILP manager from Riverside County. Records available to researchers were then used for the study. However, several preventative measures were taken to safeguard the confidentiality of individuals. First, all of the information collected on participants was translated to numerical values so that variables such as gender were not disclosed. For example, the numerical values of 1 (representing males) and 2 (representing females) were assigned to express the gender of the individuals whose records had been selected. In addition, other identifying information such as names, and addresses were not necessary in measuring the hypothesis, thus not included in the information gathering process. Second, any information that was taken outside of the agency context had already been transcribed to preserve the individuals confidentiality. At no time were any agency records or photocopies of records taken outside the agencies confines. Also, the ILP manager reviewed all transcribed information before

the information was allowed outside the facility. Third, records with identifying information remained in the confines of the agencies ILP Department where access was restricted to the researchers and ILP Director alone.

### Data Analysis

The data was examined using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The research question was assessed by examining possible factors (independent variables) that lead to foster youth passing or failing the California High School Exit Exam (dependent variable).

The independent variables were used to gauge the foster youth's academic achievement (success or failure of the CAHSEE). In assessing the association between the number of placements and CAHSEE status, the chi-square test and Pearson's correlation tests were used.

In using chi-square tests, both variables being measured need to be nominal or ordinal. This study examined the independent variables of ethnicity, gender, type of substantiated abuse, placement type, and multiple substantiated types of abuse with our dependent variable of passing or failing the CAHSEE. Using chi-square tests

and the results of those tests are discussed in Chapter Five.

The Pearson's correlation test was used to test data at the interval/ratio levels of measurement. Independent variables examined were: age, months in foster care, months in current placement, number of placements, substantiated types of abuse, number of school placements, placement type, credits completed at time of the exam, number of previous referrals, and multiple substantiated types of abuse. The independent variables were tested for association with the dependent variable, of passing or failing the English and math sections of the CAHSEE. Results of the statistical tests are discussed in Chapter Five.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between types of abuse, placement mobility, school changes, completed school credits, prior CPS referrals, and placement duration and type to determine the pass or fail results of foster youth taking the California High School Exit Exam. The findings of this study hopefully provide a deeper understanding on how to

improve the educational achievement of foster youth. By using detailed specifications describing the methodology guiding the study, researchers hope to create a better interpretation on what services might be offered to this disadvantaged group.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Descriptive Statistics

In total, records from 91 individuals in the foster care system in Riverside County, California were included in this study. The average child in this study had spent four years and ten months in foster care. Individuals ranged in ages from 16 to 19 years old. There were 43 eighteen-year-olds, which represented the largest age group (47 percent), followed by the seventeen-year-olds, which represented approximately 37 percent of the sampled cases. The sixteen and nineteen year olds were the remaining individuals in this study, and they represented 9.9 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics from the Data Extracted from 91 Case Files of Foster Youth in Riverside County

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	16	19	17.48	.751
Months in foster care	1	216	58.45	56.988
Months in current placement	1	181	14.20	23.895
Number of Placements	1	25	4.63	3.717
Types of abuse substantiated	1	5	2.29	1.708
Number of School Placements	1	7	2.10	1.202
Number of Previous Referrals	0	30	7.02	6.601

Table includes six of the variables included in this study, and describes their occurrence among samples.

With regards to ethnicity and gender of the individuals represented in this study, 34.1 percent are African American, 33 percent Caucasian, 25.3 percent Hispanic, 6.6 percent Asian, and 1.1 percent in the "other" category (Hawaiian) (see Figure 2). Females represented 60 percent and males represented 40 percent of the individuals studied.

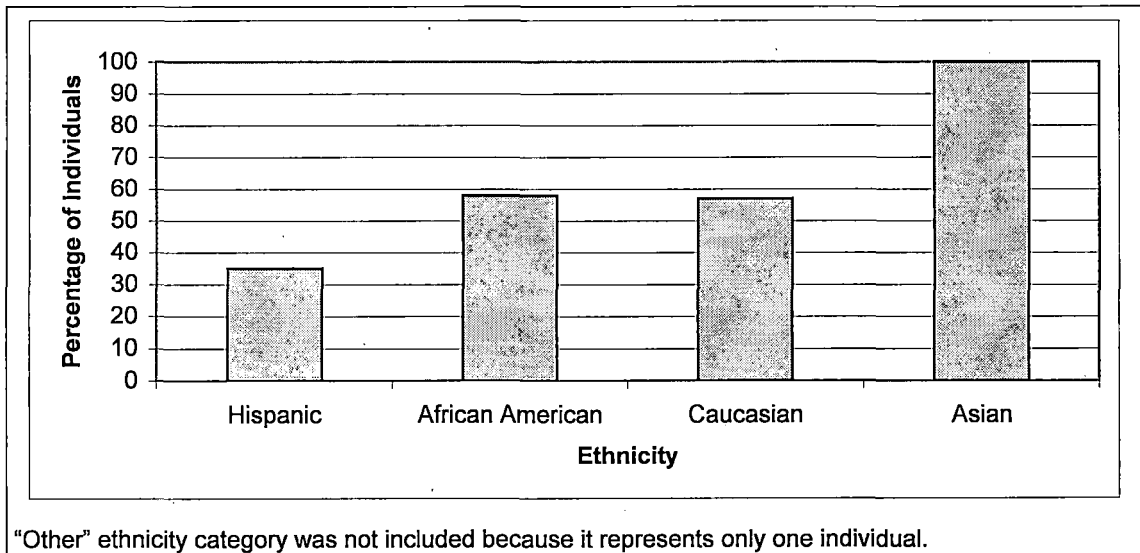


Figure 1. Percentage of Individuals Representing the Ethnicities Studied Passing Both Sections of the California High School Exit Exam

With respect to the amount of time a foster child had been in his or her current placement, the average time was just over one year, at 14.2 months.

Another important research variable used to examine passing and failing rates of the California exit exam was the number of placements moves. The average number of different placements that these foster youth experienced was 4.6.

Another variable was the substantiated type(s) of abuses that originally placed each child in the foster care system (Figure 2). Neglect was the most common type



of abuse with 58.2 percent, followed by caretaker absence with 24.2 percent, then sexual abuse with 7.7 percent, then physical abuse with 6.6 percent, and finally emotional/psychological with 3.3 percent of the substantiated types of abuse. Of the 91 individuals in the study, 17.6 percent (16 individuals) had more than one substantiated type of abuse reported in their cases.

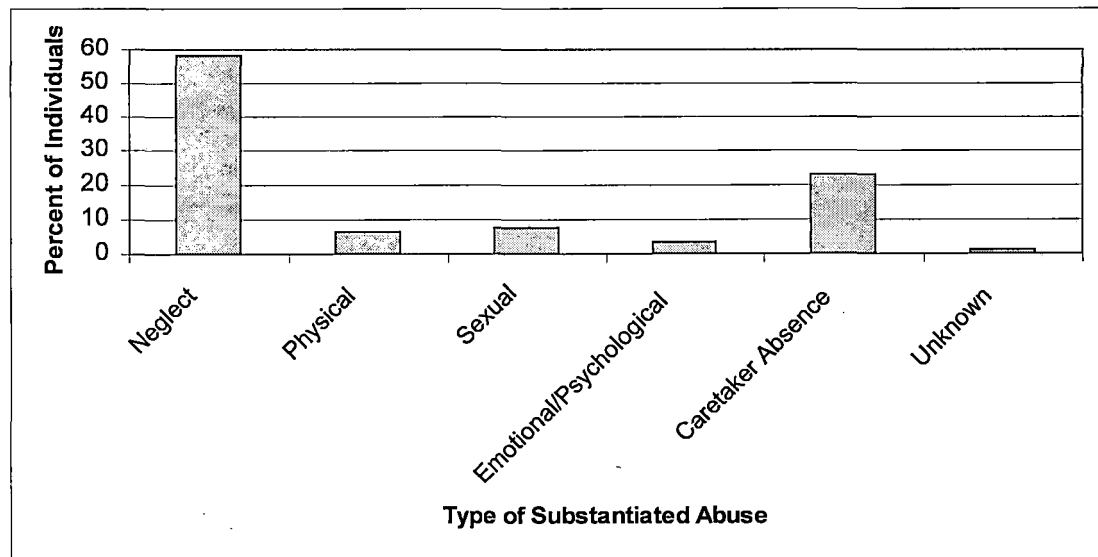


Figure 2. Types of Abuse Experienced by Individuals in the Study

The number of different school placements were as follows: 36.3 percent had only one school placement, another 36.3 percent had two, 16.5 percent had three, and

the final 10 percent had between four and seven school placement changes.

Fifty-nine (59.3%) percent of the individuals were placed in Non-kinship placements. Twenty-seven point five percent were in kinship placements. The final 13.2 percent of individuals resided in an institutional group home.

The average number of completed high school credits of the individuals in this study was 91. The minimum was 10 credits, and maximum 157 credits with the standard deviation of 32 credits.

Most of the individuals had previous child abuse and neglect referrals that were unfounded, inconclusive, or substantiated. It is unknown what the outcomes of any of the previous referrals were, as this information was not included in the case files that were examined. However, the average number of previous referrals was 7, the mode was 3, previous referrals and 6.6 was the standard deviation. Almost sixty five percent (64.8) of the individuals had between 0-7 referrals, 26.4 percent had between 8-16 referrals, and 8.8 percent of the individuals had between 18-30 previous referrals.

Scores on the English and math exams are as follows: 63.7 percent of the individuals passed and 36.3 percent failed the English part of the exam. Fifty-six percent of the individuals passed and 44 percent failed the math section of the exam.

In order to graduate from high school and receive a diploma, individuals must pass both the English and Math parts of the exam, and for this reason, further analyses used the term "passed" to signify the passing of both of these exams. In this study, 53.8 percent of the individuals passed both the English and math parts of the exam. Forty-six point two percent of the individuals failed at least one or both sections. Thirty-four (34.1%) percent failed both the English and math sections. Nine point nine percent passed the English and failed the math and 2.2 percent passed the math and failed the English section of the exam.

Two types of statistical tests were performed in an effort to assess the variables: the Pearson Chi-Square test and the Pearson Co-efficient Correlation test.

The variables that were tested using the Pearson Chi-Square test were ethnicity, gender, types of substantiated abuse, placement type, and multiple

substantiated types of abuse were all compared to the variable of the combined English and math scores of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). A discussion of the meaning of these results is addressed in Chapter 5 of this report.

In chi-square test comparing the variables of ethnicity and the combined English and math CAHSEE scores, the calculated chi-square is 15.599 with 12 degrees of freedom (df) and a .210 significance score, indicating that there was not a statistical relationship between ethnicity and the passing of the exit exam (see Table 2 for a summary of all chi-square tests).

Table 2. Results of the Chi-square Tests on the Independent Variables Compared to the Passing of the Exit Exam

Variable	Calculated Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Value
Ethnicity	15.599	12	.210
Gender	1.733	3	.630
Type of Abuse Substantiated	20.405	12	.060
Placement Type	8.207	6	.223
Multiple Substantiated Types of Abuse	10.030	3	.018

Asterisks indicate statistical significance at the  $P < .05$  level.

Chi-square also indicated that there was no association between gender and passing the CAHSEE (calculated chi-square = 1.733, df = 1, P = .630)

The chi-square test comparing the variables of type of substantiated abuse and the combined English and Math CAHSEE scores, the chi-square p-value is 20.405 with a degree of freedom (df) score of 12 and a .060 significance value score, indicating no association between these two variables.

Our results also suggest that placement type did not have a statistically significant association with passing the exit exam (calculated chi-square = 8.207, df = 6, probability value = .223).

In contrast to the other pairs of variables measured in this study (the relationship of passing the exam with placement type, type of substantiated abuse, and ethnicity) there was a significant association relating multiple substantiated types of abuse to the passing of the CAHSEE (chi square = 10.03, df = 3, P = .018).

#### Correlations

Four variables seem to have a significant association to passing the exit exam. These include:

number of placements, types of abuse substantiated, number of school placements, and credits completed at the exam date (see Figure 3). All of the other variables showed no statistical correlation to passing the exit exam.

Table 3. Results from Pearson Correlation Tests Relating Independent Variables Included in this Study to the Passing of the California High School Exit Exam

Variable	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Significance Value
Age	-.109	.303
Ethnicity	-.175	.097
Gender	-.067	.529
Months in FC	.085	.424
Months in Current Placement	-.035	.743
Number of Placements	.302	.004*
Types of abuse substantiated	-.341	.001*
Number of school placements	.214	.042*
Placement type	.161	.128
Units completed at time of exam	-.285	.006
Number of previous referrals	.168	.111
Multiple substantiated types of abuse	-.166	.116

Asterisks indicate significance at the  $P < .05$  level.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

Differences in educational achievements between foster youth and non-foster youth are well documented (Nelson et al., 2001; Zetlin et al., 2004; Zima et al., 2000). In particular, past research suggests that the areas of greatest deficit in foster youth education include language arts subjects and math (Zima et al., 2000). Both of these subjects are directly assessed by the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). When comparing the passing rates of this exam for foster children and non-foster children, it is clear that foster children tend to achieve less than their counterparts. Our data set included foster children in Riverside County, California ages 16-19, some of whom have taken the exam only once, and others of whom have taken it multiple times. Comparing their scores to the general population of first-time CAHSEE test takers (a conservative comparison, in that some individuals included in our data set have had the opportunity to take the exam multiple times), it was found that the foster youth are far behind the other students. While 75 percent

of students in the class of 2008 passed the mathematics portion of the test and 77 percent in that class passed the English-language arts portion of the test on their first time (California Department of Education website, <http://cahsee.cde.ca.gov>), our data set showed that 56 percent of the youth in the study passed the math portion and 63 percent passed the English-language arts section. Clearly, there is a large discrepancy from the foster youth data set to the general class of 2008 data set. This finding echoes past research that states that youths in foster care typically perform significantly lower on standardized tests than do other students (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003)

Twelve independent variables were assessed for correlation with the passing or failing of the exit exam to help explain why foster children perform poorly on the CASHEE. The test variables include: age, gender, ethnicity, months in foster care, months in current placement, placement type, number of home placements, substantiated type of abuse, whether or not their were multiple types of substantiated abuse, number of school placements, units completed at time of exam, and number of previous referrals.



Interestingly, most of the variables included in this study were not statistically significant with respect to their association with the individual's passing or failing of the CAHSEE.

#### Ethnicity

In our study, there was no relationship between ethnicity and the passing of the CAHSEE ( $P = .097$ ). However, the same trends are noted with respect to passing/failing and ethnicity in the foster youth compared to the non-foster youth. In the general student population for the Class of 2007, it was found that Hispanic students had the lowest pass rate of all the ethnicities (at 83%) (California Department of Education website, <http://cahsee.cde.ca.gov>). Hispanics had the lowest pass rate in our data set as well (Figure 1 Results Chapter). Interestingly, all the individuals of Asian ethnicity included in our data set passed both the English and mathematics sections of the CAHSEE. However, this is likely due to our small sample size for this ethnicity ( $n = 6$ ), and the fact that these individuals have had very low numbers of school placements (five of

the six have only had one school placement, and the other has only had two).

It's also important to note with regards to ethnicity that, African American children represent the largest ethnic type and are clearly over represented in this study.

#### Gender

There was no significant correlation between gender and passing the exit exam ( $p = .529$ ). The chi-square statistic supports the correlation statistic, as it was statistically non-significant as well ( $P = .63$ ). Therefore, our data suggests that there are likely similarities in the stressors inhibiting educational development for males and females in foster care. Both sexes are similar with respects to how they will achieve educational goals. Gender is not a significant factor that one can identify as something that will prescribe a positive or negative outcome for a foster child. And, if it can be assumed that there is no difference in the barriers that males and females in foster care experience, then, policies instituted to mitigate

existing problems could benefit individuals of either gender.

#### Age and Number of School Placements

No significant correlation was found between age of student and passing of the exit exam ( $P = .303$ ). In general, it would be expected that older students would have a greater pass rate than younger students because they would have had more years in the educational system. This is not necessarily true for foster children, and other variables may play a major role in the actual amount of years they are in school. For example (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003), mention a previous study conducted by Calvin (2001) that estimated it can take a child four to six months to "catch-up" after changing school placements. Also, children are often not immediately enrolled in school following a placement change, consequently losing more instructional time (Zetlin et al., 2006). Therefore, whereas traditional students tend to accumulate more and more instructional time with age, this correlation may not be as strong among foster youth.

A more appropriate measure for the foster youth population may be the number of school placements they

have had. Our research does find a correlation here, showing that as number of school placements increases, the failure rate increases as well (.042). This supports the findings of previous research that states that school placement instability negatively affects academic performance for foster children (Zetlin et al., 2006; Zima et al., 2000).

#### Months in Foster Care

There is no correlation with the amount of time a child has spent in foster care and passing the exit exam ( $P = .424$ ). This means that the length of time a child spends in foster care is not a factor that indicates whether a child will pass or fail the exit exam. This suggests that foster care in and of itself does not pose a barrier to a child's education, because children who have been in foster care for long periods of time are no more likely to fail the exam than children who have been in the system for short periods of time. Rather, it is likely that factors incidental to being in foster care hinder their educational attainment. For example, past research (Zima et al., 2000; Zetlin et al., 2004; Zetlin et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2002) cite increased

mobility of students as such a factor, which is supported by this study as well, as will further be discussed.

#### Months in Current Placement

There is no correlation with amount of time a foster child spends in his/her current placement and the passing of the exit exam ( $p = .743$ ). Our data suggests that if a foster child has spent only a short time in his/her current placement or a long time there it has no effect on that child passing the exit exam. One might expect that months in current placement would be closely tied with mobility, however, the independent variable "number of placements" is a much better measure of mobility, because it shows exactly how many times a foster child has been moved since entering the system. In our study, there was probably too much variance with respect to months in current placement (the data range in our sample of 91 individuals was 180 months) coupled with too small of a sample size overall to detect a statistically significant difference.

#### Number of Placements

There seems to be a strong correlation in the number of placements that a foster child has had with the

passing of the exit exam ( $P = .004$ ). This suggests that as the number of placements increase, the likelihood that a foster child's education be negatively affected increases as well (as is supported by previous research: Zima et al., 2000; Zetlin et al., 2004; Zetlin et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2002). Ultimately, this has an impact on passing the high school exit exam. This issue needs to be addressed at both the macro level of social work practice and also at the micro level when working with foster children.

At the macro level, agencies such as the Department of Children's Services should be aware of the possible implications that the number of placements that a foster child experiences can have a big impact on that foster child's education. Those foster children that have had a high number of placement changes need to be identified and made a priority at the macro-level (the policy level), then assessed and given extra services on a micro-level (for example: access to remedial education programs, after school tutors and homework help, teachers aides and so on may benefit students who are behind in their studies because they have been moved) so that they will have the opportunity to succeed educationally.

At the micro level, social workers could benefit from understanding the possible negative effects of having a high number of placements on the children's education. Social workers can advocate for their children and get the services that each of the children on their caseloads need. If social workers more fully understood the implications of the number of placements a foster child experiences, they might be more inclined to find more suitable stable placements for the individuals on their caseloads, or, attempt to move them only between school years or during breaks, or alternatively to provide increased supportive services to foster parents and children that would decrease the need for additional moves.

#### Substantiated Types of Abuse

The substantiated type of abuse appears to be correlated to passing the high school exit exam ( $p = .001$ ). In our study, neglect was by far the most common type of abuse experienced (58.2 percent) and the results of our statistical analysis suggest that neglect has the largest correlation with failing the exit exam. However, our data may be somewhat skewed because there

were significantly higher numbers of individuals experiencing neglect than any of the other types. The second most commonly experienced type of abuse is caretaker absence (23%), which can also be interpreted as a subtype of neglect. Each of the other four types of abuse were substantiated in less than 10% of test individuals each.

This variable was also tested using chi-square test with the results differing. The significance value of this variable (from Table 2) is .060, which is close to the  $P = .05$  significance cut-off. The disparity in these two statistics may reflect small sample size.

#### Placement Type

There appears to be no correlation between the type of placement that a foster child is placed in and in the passing of the high school exit exam ( $p = .128$ ). This means that whether the child is placed in kinship, non-kinship, or group homes, these factors don't seem to have an impact on whether the child passes or fails on the exit exam.

The chi-square test was also used to compare placement type and passing the high school exit exam. The



results of the chi-square test are on Table 2 of Chapter 4, and they also support the correlation test ( $P = .223$ ). Both the correlation and chi-square tests appear to suggest that the type of placement that a foster child resides in, has limited to no implication to passing the high school exit exam. This finding should be encouraging to social workers who supervise caseloads. Typically, social workers prefer to place children in kinship placements whenever possible, however, this type of placement is often hard to find. The results of these studies should be encouraging to micro social workers. They can be more confident that placing children in other types of placements might not adversely affect the educational achievement of foster children, all other things being equal.

#### Credits Completed at Exam Date

The number of units completed at the time of the exam and passing the high school exit exam seem to have a high correlation ( $p = .006$ , table 3). This appears to mean that as a foster child has completed more units, the more likely it is that the child will be successful in passing the exit exam. This is as expected, because to

earn units, as student must have successfully passed a course, implying that they had an adequate level of mastery of the subject matter. Therefore, students who have earned a high number of units will have mastered more of the curriculum that they will be tested on in the CAHSEE.

According to the California State education website, (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>) the state allows each county to choose how many credits it requires to graduate. Generally speaking it takes approximately 180 credits for any child to graduate high school. It might be expected that the number of credits a child has completed would be a likely indicator that the individual would have success if more units were completed and failure if less units were completed. The average number of units completed of the foster children in this study is approximately 91 units, well below what is needed to graduate (approximately 180 units).

It must be noted, however, that the individual with the highest number of units (157) in our study had 157 had not passed either of the tests. This suggests that the variables that help predict whether or not an individual will succeed educationally and pass or fail

the exit exam are complex and unique to each individual and their resiliency of the experiences they've had.

#### Number of Previous Referrals

There appears to be no correlation between the number of previous referrals a foster child has had and passing the high school exit exam ( $P = .111$ ). This finding is likely due to the high amount of variance in our sample (one individual had 30 previous referrals). Also, number of referrals does not necessarily mean that any abuse was substantiated, it just means that a report was made. Therefore, there is no reason to expect that number of referrals would in any way affect the educational development and ultimately the passing or failing of the exit exam.

#### Multiple Substantiated Types of Abuse

While type of abuse in this study was significant, it appears that having experienced multiple types of abuse does not increasingly adversely affect the passing or failing of the high school exit exam (Pearson Correlation Coefficient  $P = .116$ ). However, the chi-square test that compared the variable of multiple types of abuse and passing the exit exam found the

opposite of the previous correlation test. The chi-square test in Table 2 of Chapter 4 showed that this variable had a significance value of .018. The chi-square test affirms that an individual who had multiple types of abuses substantiated in their case, that it would indeed be a factor that would effect the passing or failing of the exit exam.

The causes of why foster children are not passing the exit exam at the same rate as non-foster children are very complex and this study does not try to explain causes, but rather factors that are related to not passing the exit exam.

#### Limitations of this Study

This study was limited in that the sample size was comparatively small consisting of only 91 foster children from one county. A larger sample size would have helped to eliminate contradictory findings between correlations and chi-square tests, as was the case with two of the variables. A larger sample size would be helpful in getting a more comprehensive understanding of the complex variables that effect education and passing or failing the high school exit exam.

Another limitation was the sample pool from which our cases were chosen. We were only able to get an availability sample, not a random sample, as we would have preferred. The problem with an availability sample is that it is impossible for the researchers to know how representative the data is of the true population. It would have improved the validity of this study if all the records of foster children in Riverside County age 16 to 19 had been in the population from which the sample was taken.

Another limitation of this study was that the scope of the study was limited in that the sample gathered was from only one county. Therefore, it is not known whether or not the findings from this study can be accurately extrapolated to California foster children in general.

Another limitation of this study is that grades were not one of the variables looked at in this study because of those records being unavailable from the DCS case records. Having grades to look at would have been one important variable to discuss and learn more about. Also, much research that has already been done includes grades as a variable in understanding the successfulness of

foster children in their education (Runyan & Gould, 1985).

#### Improvements for Study

Improvements for this study would be to look at each type of abuse (neglect, physical, mental/emotional, and sexual abuse) separately. That would allow a more comprehensive understanding of how abuse effects of education and passing the exit exam.

Another improvement would be to do a more in depth study on whether multiple substantiated types of abuse are indeed indicative of passing or failing the exit exam. Furthermore, an evaluation of the different combinations of abuses could be important to understanding their effects to foster children and their education.

#### Implications to Social Work Practice

Information gained from this study is potentially valuable because the education of foster youth is extremely important, and may be strongly related to how successful these individuals will be in adulthood. Part of being successful educationally in California is being able to pass the high school exit exam, and without a

passing score on this exam, students cannot earn their high school diploma. Social workers need to aware of the factors that lead to the foster children in their caseloads and be given the ability to address those needs.

As discussed above, not knowing the individual grades was a limitation of this study. Social workers need to be aware of the grades of the children on their caseloads and if social workers could more easily track the grades of individuals on their caseloads, they could quickly offer appropriate services to children who are struggling academically. If social workers don't know the grades of the children on their caseloads, then how can they assess the educational needs of those children?

Further studies need to be done to continually assess what factors relate to foster children not succeeding academically at the same rate as non-foster children. Little is understood about the factors that contribute to foster children not succeeding in school because of the complexity and diversity of the problem, and the interrelatedness of many of the variables involved. In order for social workers to use best

practices with their clients, they need a more complete understanding of these critically important issues.

This study was important in identifying several factors that social workers can be aware of and address in their work with their children on their caseloads. Perhaps one of the most important findings was the relationship between number of credits completed to the passing or failing of the exit exam. Social workers should be aware of the amount of credits a child has completed in order to use that information as a marker in assessing the child's progress towards receiving his/her diploma. Social workers can also work with the children on their caseloads in getting them the tutoring they need or to help identify learning problems these children may have or obtain other needed educational services.

Another finding was the importance of limiting the number of placements a foster child has. It is very possible and likely that with a placement change, a school change will come as well. A reduction in the number of placements could have a positive impact on the lives of the children in care. The number of placements is inversely related to the degree of stability a foster child experiences and the number of placements clearly



seems to adversely affect the educational achievement level of some foster youth.

These factors, for the most part, are in agreement and support past research on the educational attainment of foster children. Factors that this study found to be most important and need immediate attention are; limiting the number of placements and addressing the need to increase the number of high school credits foster children accumulate. As attention to these factors increases, it improves the chances of foster children getting the educational services they need, passing the California High School Exit Exam, obtaining a high school diploma, and having greater career and vocational opportunities available in young adulthood.

APPENDIX  
DATA EXTRACTION FORM

Data Extraction Form

1. Current Age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Ethnicity?
  1. Hispanic
  2. African American
  3. Caucasian
  4. Asian
  5. Other
3. Gender?
  1. Male
  2. Female
4. Months in foster care? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Months in current placement? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Number of placements the foster child has been in \_\_\_\_\_
7. Types of abuse substantiated? (Check all that apply)  
 Neglect  
 Physical  
 Sexual  
 Emotional/Psychological  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. Number of school changes the foster child has had? \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Current placement type? (check one)  
 Kinship  
 Non-kinship  
 Institutional group home
10. Score on High School Exit Exam?  
 Pass       Fail
11. Date the exam was taken \_\_\_\_\_
12. Number of units complete at time of exam \_\_\_\_\_
13. Number of previous referrals \_\_\_\_\_

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

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

1. Data Collection:

Assigned Leader: Mike Edwards

Assisted By: Brandon Thayn

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Assigned Leader: Brandon Thayn

Assisted By: Mike Edwards

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Mike Edwards & Brandon Thayn

b. Methods

Team Effort: Mike Edwards & Brandon Thayn

c. Results

Team Effort: Mike Edwards & Brandon Thayn

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Mike Edwards & Brandon Thayn