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PERSPECTIVES ON THE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY FOSTER YOUTH AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY FOSTER YOUTH
AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

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
Bianca Rivera
Aileen Ramirez Lopez

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

The foster youth is a population in the child welfare arena where social workers continue to work and engage in providing effective and supportive resources. This population already vulnerable due to traumatic experiences, continue to lift the veil and fight against all odds. As change agents, we recognize their perspectives are critical to understanding and creating changes that will grant these youth higher academic success rates. This qualitative research includes thirteen open-ended questions regarding the perspectives of eleven former and current foster youth participants. Participants were provided the opportunity to identify the barriers they have face or are facing while attempted, attending and/or completing higher education. This insight provides an understanding of the views and obstacles that impede foster youths' academic careers. Researchers distinguished barriers and explored options for these youths to meet higher academic success rates. Foster youths' voices will be heard and will have a lasting imprint on students moving forward.

Keywords: foster care youth, higher education, barriers, child welfare

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Bianca Rivera

I would like to first thank, Aileen Lopez, my beloved friend, for all of her hard work and dedication to this study. This research could not have been possible without you. Thank you for pushing me! I am forever grateful for your friendship!

To my parents and brother, thank you for all your support throughout my educational career. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me every step of the way, I am forever grateful for your unconditional support and love. I share this accomplishment with you guys! I love you guys!

Para mi padres queridos, gracias por darme la oportunidad de continuar mi educación. ¡Siempre estaré agradecida por todo lo que han sacrificado por mí! Todo este trabajo se lo dedico a ustedes y comparto este logro con ustedes! ¡Los amo mucho! ¡Si se pudo!

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Aileen Ramirez Lopez

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I also want to thank myself for going from a continuation high school to completing a master's degree. I would have never thought I would be saying

those words. When barriers were stacked against me, I found the strength to push forward. From being told, I was not school material; I am proof that anything is possible, especially when you push those boundaries. As my eighth-grade teacher once told me, "you did it, on the hair on your chinny chin chin, you did it!"

DEDICATION

We want to dedicate this research to the foster youth participants who voluntarily participated in this study. We appreciate the time you spent with us to conduct this research, as we know your perspectives are critical not only to our research but also for other researchers. In the short time we had to interview you all, we gained such a better perspective into the lives of those who have been in the foster youth system.

Bianca and I, want to let you know we appreciate you all immensely and hope you are as proud of this research as we are of you. For all the foster youth who continue to make strides and push forward, this research is for you after all you have been through. As social workers, we will continue to make efforts to decrease these barriers that have stacked against you, but as resilient as you are, you all keep proving you are all much stronger than we know! Keep up the hard work and dedication, and continue to push those boundaries!

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Over 442,000 children in foster care in the United States vary from the ages of 1 to 20 years old (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017). More than 80% of foster care youth have expressed aspirations to obtain higher education (Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). However, they are among the lowest-achieving recognizable groups in higher education who receive a degree from a college or university (Casey Family Programs, 2011). Research indicates that 3-11% of foster youth who apply to colleges or universities obtain a college degree (Franco & Durdella, 2018). Transitional youth or foster youth are more likely than low-income, first-generation students to withdraw from college after their first year (Piel, 2018). This low percentage among foster youth correlates to the experiences they faced before and during foster care. These experiences then create many barriers and challenges for foster youth while attempting to achieve higher education. For example, many foster youths face barriers such as substance abuse, physical and mental health issues, homelessness, poverty, and higher education framework that prevent foster youth from attending and obtaining a college degree (Franco & Durdella, 2018).

Studying this problem is vital to social work practice because it aligns with one of the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, n.d). The field of social work involves social justice and social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable, oppressed individuals and groups of people. In order to pursue social change

within this population, it is essential to understand the barriers foster youth face while completing their higher education. Once these barriers are understood, social workers can formulate possible solutions or provide appropriate resources to break those barriers for foster youth to obtain higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The results of this study give significant information on the perspectives of former foster youth and their lens on higher education in regards to both micro and macro social work practice. In this study, higher education is identified as any schooling beyond high school, such as trade school, community college, and university.

At the micro-level, this problem creates many consequences for foster youth when trying to obtain higher education. For example, when transitioning to post-secondary education, a majority of this population who pursue to further their education are faced with many different barriers or issues. Throughout the study, issues that may affect foster youth are substance abuse, physical and mental health issues, homelessness, poverty, and higher education framework (Franco & Durdella, 2018). If these issues are not appropriately addressed, this population is at a higher risk of failure. Although obtaining higher education is ideal for the foster youth population to prosper in life, it could also create more stress and barriers, leading to a low percentage of graduates within this population. By exploring the obstacles, it provides new insight into the barriers to understanding specific resources that are needed for this population to succeed.

At the macro level, some of the barriers former foster youth are affected by are the policies and initiatives instilled to help alleviate any possible consequences that impact this population. Since this population is vulnerable, they can lack access to resources, which increases their risks and challenges to a flawed system. These are social issues that must be addressed at the national level since this population is at such a low risk of furthering their education.

The implications of this research assist social workers at the micro and macro levels and current and former foster youth. This must be addressed in order to cease barriers impeding their lives. One example identified, university personnel should assist and promote resources for this population and guide these students to success. The lack of knowledge the university personnel holds can have lasting effects that can be place students at a disadvantage. Some students are not aware of existing resources, which should be essential to them compared to their counterparts. These examples include filling Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), housing, and scholarships. Students also lack access to mental health care and treatment.

In most cases, foster youth struggle with trauma caused by child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment. Students rely almost exclusively upon the public mental health system for services. They also use a disproportionate amount of Medicaid-funded mental health services. Studies found that foster youth use 15 to 20 times the amount of mental health services than any other youth on Medicaid (Huber & Grimm, n.d.). Healthcare and mental health for foster youth

students should be guaranteed and accessible when needed, especially when mental issues caused by trauma go untreated; this can lead to detrimental effects.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The information provided gives this population a deeper understanding of these barriers. These youth can be successful, thriving individuals who have beaten the odds through resiliency and increase the rate of graduations. As Title IV-E recipients, this research topic was chosen to understand the foster youth population. Ultimately, conducting this research aims to gain a better perspective on the barriers that can cause possible delays when entering various fields in higher education; this information is valuable as child welfare workers in the future.

Additionally, researching this information will guide social workers, educators, and mental health professionals, and other professionals in suggested improvements for this youth by providing appropriate resources. These findings will be necessary to find new methods of increasing graduation rates and explain these foster youth barriers. Additionally, obtaining information on specific hurdles that impede this population and gathering data will implement all social work levels. All things considered, the research question for this project is as follows: What are former and current foster youth students' perspectives on the barriers they face while attempted, attending and/or completing higher education?

CHAPTER TWO

PERSPECTIVES ON THE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY FOSTER YOUTH AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

As much as 80% of foster care youth have expressed aspirations to obtain higher education (Kirk, Lewis, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011). This population naturally focuses on their educational goals in college. Research indicates 3-11% of foster youth who apply to colleges or universities obtain a college degree (Franco & Durdella, 2018). This low percentage among foster youth is correlated to their experiences before and during foster care, such as mental health, substance abuse, homelessness, and higher education framework (Franco & Durdella, 2018).

Mental Health

Research has indicated that 80% of children in the foster care system have higher rates of mental health issues compared to 22% of the general population (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2019), nearly half of youths placed in foster care have significant emotional or behavioral issues. Once in college, foster youth are less likely than non-foster youth to engage or seek formal mental health services (Jackson et al., 2019). After a month of departing from foster care services, the use of mental health services among foster youth decreases by 60% (McMillen & Raghavan, 2009). These mental health issues have a significant effect on the student's academic performance, retention of material,

and graduation rates, which is why high dropout rates and academic failure are among these students. However, this information is critical when interviewing foster youth students because many factors contribute to their barriers while attending college.

Substance Abuse

According to Blake, Tung, Langley, and Waterman (2018), foster youth are twice as likely to meet substance abuse criteria compared to non-foster youth. The foster youth population also experience significant hardships and stressors both before and after entering foster care that has major impacts on their development (Blake et al., 2018). This population has a unique set of risk factors, which increases the risk of substance abuse. Studies have shown children whose parents suffer from substance abuse show increased rates in developing substance use than non-foster youth (Chassin & Barrera, 1993). Similarly, many universities and colleges that lack engagement in addressing substance abuse among their foster youth students lead to higher academic failure (Brook, Rifenbark, Boulton, Little, & McDonald, 2015). Additionally, the research found that substance use escalated during the transition out of foster care into independent living (Narendorf & McMillen, 2010).

Homelessness

Although foster youth have the desire and motivation to earn a college degree, only a small fraction of young adults who have experienced

homelessness or foster care successfully achieve this goal (Skobba, Meyers, & Tiller, 2018). Some of the challenges foster youth encounter throughout their childhood often continue into young adulthood, making their transition to college significantly difficult (Piel, 2018). These challenges include home instability, insufficient financial resources and academic preparation, early independence, lack of awareness of college resources, and inability to meet basic needs, causing immense difficulties in postsecondary education (Skobba, Meyers, & Tiller, 2018). As students experience homelessness, it disrupts their academic studies and causes stress (Perry, 2006). Balancing access to food and shelter while regularly attending classes can be challenging to this population (Hallet, Freas, & Mo, 2018). This then causes students to pause their enrollment when a housing crisis occurs (Hallet et al., 2018). These barriers are essential when understanding foster youths' perspectives on the obstacles they encounter while attending post-secondary education.

Higher Education Framework

Among foster youth, there are several barriers they encounter from their childhood education to their college education; within this population, it has been identified that traumatic experiences impact students attempting to complete a college degree (Jackson et al., 2019). These students must have mental health services set in place at school campuses due to these experiences, which is due to a high prevalence of mental health services needed amongst these students. Foster youth individuals can benefit immensely from counseling services; these

services are vital to students' success and overall functioning. As the article states, there are numerous programs set in place for this population, but supplemental support is needed to aid in attending college (Hallet et al., 2018).

Establishing academic capital, a framework directed to access college education in that the individual's education and experiences can be utilized in society. This framework becomes a challenge to foster youth due to multiple homes and school placements before turning 18. When individuals age out of the foster care system, many emancipate without the skills needed to navigate college and adulthood successfully. Nonetheless, there are services in place that support them, but they are not coordinated, making it difficult for students to utilize services (Whitman, 2018).

Student services personnel, especially those who work with low-income and first-generation college students, are often unaware of and unprepared to address the unique challenges that these young adults face (Dworsky, 2017). Furthermore, they have a direct impact on student success, retention, and graduation rates, contributing to a rise in academic failure rates. For institutions to successfully remove mental health stigma amongst this population, college personnel must understand help-seeking behaviors and develop strategies to assist in their mental health needs.

Although these barriers were identified in the research, Kitzrow (2003) reported that when students receive assistance for their psychological obstacles, positive impacts on their well-being, academic performance, and retention are

distinguished as a need within this population. The literature has noted that campuses are overextended, and numbers continue to rise with students seeking mental health support. As the research indicates, the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, in 2016–2017, 34% of university counseling centers had to add students onto a waitlist (Burwell, 2018). With this being said, university personnel must be adequately trained. There is a high need to explore strategies to meet the needs of this population.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A theory applied to conceptualize the ideas in this study is Self-determination theory (SDT). Self-determination theory is based on human personality and motivation developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Jackson et al., 2019). This theory is based on how individuals interact and count on the social environment that can, subsequently, affect their personality, motivation, and overall functioning (Jackson et al., 2019). This theory indicates a person's innate growth and psychological needs are the basis for self-motivation and personality integration (Jackson et al., 2019). To understand this behavior driven by individuals, it is essential to recognize the needs impacted by goals that must be addressed.

This theory is appropriate as it applies to three basic psychological needs, competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These needs play a distinctive role in an individual's well-being and self-determination. Competence is the ability to be effective, resulting in the individual interaction with the social environment in that

they can show their talents met with challenges (Jackson et al., 2019). In doing so, their need for success will result in accomplishing outcomes. Relatedness is described as a feeling of belonging. This can be with others or in a community where others share the feeling of caring. Autonomy is the perception to govern one's own behavior. The individual's need will feel a sense of self-direction and self-approval in their actions, contrary to feeling constrained, controlled, and intimidated (Jackson et al., 2019).

This theory assumes individuals will aspire to grow and understand themselves by incorporating new experiences, enriching their needs, desires, and interests; and establishing relationships with others in and around their space (Jackson et al., 2019). This theory also emphasizes if individuals have feelings of alienation, their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness will be challenged with their social environment. SDT emphasizes psychological needs act as the basis for motivation to engage and to achieve goals.

There are two identified forms of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from the individual's inner drive, which affects their behavior. These core motivations are described as our interests, values, and morals. Extrinsic motivations are based on behavior and are founded on rewards to prevent any forms of punishment (Jackson et al., 2019). Individuals who apply extrinsic motivation will often accomplish any activities they set their mind to, especially when it comes to producing a reward from the outcome or motivation.

Overall, SDT is based on how individuals interact and depend on their social environment to potentially affect foster youth's personality, motivation, and overall functioning. In applying this theory, we understand that foster youth populations, no matter what barriers they face, will have intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to further their education. These youth who are self-motivated are defying the odds set against them. Furthermore, it is essential to be aware of the environment they are placed as this is a barrier that may affect them in achieving success in school.

Summary

In all, research has indicated there are several services and programs provided throughout university campuses for foster youth. At this time, it is unclear what perspectives foster youth students find detrimental to their well-being or the barriers they face. In the body of research, it has been found that students must have mental health services provided by the university to succeed (Jackson et al., 2019). As this research conducts findings on behalf of this population, there is a need for individual counseling or mentoring programs to provide one-on-one support for each student and their needs. Furthermore, researchers would like to explore whether students are utilizing mental health services at the designated schools.

Applying the SDT will bring an understanding to the foster youth population in addressing their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for their optimal functioning. This theory discusses their social environment resulting in the

individual interaction in that they can show their talents met with challenges. This is the case, especially when many foster youth placements come with oppositions at no fault of their own. This theory will also be beneficial to the findings when it comes to foster youths' perspectives. Another critical factor to consider is whether or not foster youths' psychological needs are met when attending higher education. The foster youth population has a unique set of needs that must be met. Fundamentally, understanding these needs can help future foster youths graduate at higher rates.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter three discusses the methods incorporated into this study. The design of the study assists with exploring and analyzing human experiences. This study analyzes the barriers foster youth face when achieving higher education. The researchers explain how the data is collected in this study. Additionally, this chapter describes the procedures that are utilized in the research.

Study Design

Qualitative research is the study design that appropriately addresses this research. This research study explores foster youth perspectives on the barrier they face in furthering their education. This study explores the obstacles the youth encounter and generate ideas and concepts systemically on these youth's issues. The use of participants' perspectives is utilized in this study in efforts to explore the interest in distinctive, subjective, and human experiences. These experiences are analyzed to understand the patterns and themes this foster youth population face while attending college. Potential limitations arise when using a qualitative design because there is a decrease in the number of questions researchers present to the interviewee. Another limitation the researchers encounter is all data collection is conducted via video call due to

COVID-19 in order to protect researchers and participants in this study. The research question for this study is: What are former and current foster youth students' perspectives on the barriers they face while attempted, attending and/or completing higher education? Therefore, it is hypothesized foster youth will experience an increase in financial instability and mental health needs while attending higher education.

Sampling

In order to identify the foster youth population, the researchers utilized snowball sampling, a nonprobability sampling procedure in which individuals selected for inclusion in a sample are asked to identify other individuals from the population who might be included (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). Applying systematic versions of snowball sampling can reduce the potential for any biases that may arise within the study (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). The sample size interviewed for the study are eleven participants. This sample size is a realistic number that is measurable and attainable during these unprecedented times during COVID-19. To properly and adequately address the internal data, the researchers searched for participants over the age of eighteen who were placed in a non-relative placement and who applied, attempted, or completed higher education. The external data that is unessential in this study are participants who are forty-one and older as well as those under the age of eighteen.

Data Collection and Instruments

The instrument applied this research included thirteen open-ended questions. In this qualitative research, the questions were formatted to collect detailed information about the participant's perspectives as a former and current foster youth who was placed in the child welfare system. Before completing the interview, the participants were required to read and sign the informed and audio consent. The questions are as followed: 1. What is your ethnicity? 2. What gender do you identify as? 3. What is your age? 4. What is your current or former Major or field of study? 5. How many years of higher education have you completed? 6. As a recipient of the foster care system, what barrier (mental health, substance abuse, financial instability or stability, university personnel assistance, and social support or other) has impacted positively or negatively on your educational path, and why? 7. In your experience during the time of applying, completing or in completion of higher education, what resources were provided to you? 8. Which resources did, or do you utilize, and were they useful? Why or why not? 9. In your experience, was higher education a discussion addressed in your home or foster placement? 10. Did you have a support system while achieving higher education? 11. What can social workers do to improve the barriers that foster youth face in the foster care system? 12. Are there any additional resources that would be helpful to you now and for future students in foster care? 13. Is there anything you would like to add or change with these resources? (See Appendix

A). After completing the interview, the participants were given a debriefing form that included resources for this foster youth population.

Procedures

In these unprecedented times during COVID-19, data was gathered via Zoom video conferencing call. The researchers first contacted school personnel regarding foster youth programs in the state of California, which include a program called Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). In collaboration with EOP programs, the researchers interviewed current and former foster youth students. Alternative options to gather data included a social media platform such as Instagram to identify and locate any available foster youth participants. The researchers communicated with the administrators discussed above to allocate potential participants.

Once permission was granted from these administrators, a digital flyer was posted to recruit participants for the study (See Appendix C). Participants reached out to the researchers once interested. The researchers screened the participants to ensure that they met the criteria for the study. The informed consent was addressed and sent through email (See Appendix B). Once participants were cleared, the researchers set up a time and date for interviews. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes to an hour long. When the researchers completed the interviews, the debriefing statement was stated and provided to the participants. At the end of the interview, each participant was thanked for their time and they received an e-gift card via email. In efforts of

completing data, the researchers completed eleven interviews within a two-month span. All interviews were submitted to a transcription service, these transcripts were finalized within two weeks of submission.

Protection of Human Subjects

At the end of the data collection process, all of the coded transcripts were placed in a password safe USB to ensure confidentiality. In efforts to maintain confidentiality, a new email for this research was created to protect participants and their identifying information. Furthermore, the participants were not identified by their names; instead at the end of the interview they were classified by a number. Participants were thoroughly informed of their confidentiality and the details of the research study through the informed consent and the debriefing statement. Researchers reiterated if the participants felt discomfort or had a crisis during or after the interview, the researchers provided and referred to a list of crisis resources within their county that may alleviate any ill feelings, potential triggers, or distress during the interview. For this data collection, the researchers utilized a transcribing service, Landmark Associates, to transcribe the audio from the interviews into hard copy transcripts.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was used to answer the research question regarding former and current foster youth students' perspectives on the barriers they face while attempted, attending and/or completing higher education. Upon gathering data, the researchers analyzed the information and examined for

possible themes, similarities, and differences between the participants' answers to the research question. The researchers examined the themes and placed the findings in the most appropriate category.

Summary

Researchers gathered data using an interview guide that collected demographic information and open-ended questions regarding the participants' personal perspectives. This study incorporates qualitative methods and identifies barriers that impede foster youth's academic performance to prosper in higher education. In doing so, this research can pave the way for numerous institutions, and their students to achieve higher academic success rates and other forms in higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Through interviewing many foster youth students and former foster youth students on their perspectives and experiences they've encountered while attending, attempted, and/or completed higher education, themes and interesting findings were discovered. This research aimed to collect personal experiences among these individuals and the barriers they have faced while attending, attempted, and/or completed a higher education. In this chapter, demographic information of interviewees is first presented, followed with themes that were identified while conducting the study.

Analysis

Table 1 shows the demographic information of each participant. After transcription, the 11 one-on-one interviews were analyzed. Participants were between the ages of 18 to 40 years old; the majority of participants are around the age of 20. Participants all identified with an ethnicity, most identified as Hispanic. Participants all identified as Female or Male, nine participants identified as Female. Major or field of study ranged from Undeclared, Human or Child development to Culinary Management. Despite the 4 participants that have not completed a year of higher education, the majority completed 2 or more years of higher education.

Tables 2-8 have components of foster youth perspectives organized by their experiences while attempted, attending and/or completing higher education. These components were identified through analysis of the interview transcripts. These components were decided and identified during the analysis of the transcripts and from there components were organized and combined into tables. In order to capture the factual and honest words and experiences of those interviewed, some data contains quotations around the components. This process was completed to reduce researcher bias and diminish misconstruction of data.

Data Thematic Results

The research question being addressed in this study was: What are former and current foster youth students' perspectives on the barriers they encountered while attending, attempted, and/or completed higher education. This study was aimed to understand current and former foster youth's perspectives on their personal experiences while attending/attended higher education. Conducting this research, participants' perspectives will guide social workers, educators, mental health professionals, and other professionals in suggested improvements for this youth by providing appropriate resources. These findings will be necessary to find new methods of increasing graduation rates and to possibly alleviate these foster youth barriers. From the information collected, three main themes were discovered: financial instability is a burden that continues to affect those in the foster care system, participants identified a higher

need for mental health services and a lack of social support in both familial and the child welfare system.

Table 1. Demographics of Research Participants

DEMOGRAPHIC	Participant Response
Age:	24,33,24,20,18,26,21,24,26,31,18
Ethnicity:	Filipino- Mexican, Hispanic, Hispanic, Mexican American, Mexican American, Mexican-Costa Rican-Israeli,Hispanic, Vietnamese, Caucasian, Hispanic, Vietnamese
Gender:	Male, Female, Female, Female, Female, Female, Female, Female, Male, Female, Female
Years of Higher Education Completed:	2 years, 6 years, 0 years,1.5 years, 0 years, 7 years, 0 years, 1 year, 2 years, 7 years, and 0.5 years
Major or Field of Study:	Undeclared, Child Development, Human Development and Family Psychology, Neuropsychology, Psychology, Human Resources Management Development, Chemistry, Social Work, Business Administration, Undeclared, and Culinary Management

Table 2. Direct Quote Regarding Ideas about the Barriers

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Ideas about the Barriers
1	"I would say that the foster care system definitely created a barrier in my mental health...I feel like the trauma of being in foster care doesn't allow me to remember much". (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).
2	"Yes, I would definitely say the biggest one [barrier] that's standing out would be, definitely, mental health. I guess a few others, but not as much as the mental health". (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).
3	"Mental—like mental health and financial stability". (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).
4	"I think the lack of family support; having a good support system was one of my barriers, because I'm not very close to my family...That was a barrier, just the lack of knowledge of the system itself, and the lack of knowledge of not having my own documents". (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).
5	"Financial issues... because I didn't have a car to get to school". (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).
6	"I would say some barriers that I encountered was mostly financial instability". (Ideas about the Barriers, Participant 6, February 2021).
7	"I guess the biggest barrier would probably be more of mental health issues". (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).
8	"I had pretty bad depression. I would say, even now. I just know how to cope better. I think the first year of my mental health was when I was 16 years old... I think that's a big issue is financial stability". (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).
9	"A reason why I never pursued an educational path until recently was because I did not have the financial stability to afford college or the social support to motivate me in that path". (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).
10	"Being in the system and moving frequently and moving schools... another barrier, I would say, would be the financial instability". (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).

11	“I did have a couple barriers. There was one, financially...another barrier would probably be, there isn't a lot of good influences around us, especially for me since I moved several homes, including into group homes, which are a lot worse”. (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).
----	--

Table 2 explains the barriers the participants faced while attempted, attempting and/or completing a higher education.

Table 3. Direct Quote Regarding Resources for Education

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Resources for Education
1	“I partake in the foster aide program, which does give me resources, and they are useful. They give me—they give me funds to buy my textbooks, and they give me funds for certain things like supplies, and then as well as if I’m in need of computer resources or internet resources, they try their best to find out if they can help me for that”. (Resources for Education, January 2021).
2	“Yes, I did use the bog waiver. They were very useful because money was tight at the time as it was, and I was able to attend my classes and have my classes paid for”. (Resources for Education, January 2021).
3	“Financial Aid. There was a group that was a foster youth group, and they were called independent living program. They aided me in having an apartment and trying to show us how to financially be independent. They'd get us an apartment, and they would pay for portions of the rent, and furnish it. That was a very good resource”. (Resources for Education, January 2021).
4	“The EOPS and EOP—there’s EOPS at community college, and then I was in EOP for my bachelor’s, and that was really helpful because the renaissance scholars, they do different events. They had a food pantry at my community college”. (Resources for Education, January 2021).
5	“Financial aid, and then I was gonna apply to the—what was it called—the NextUp program”. (Resources for Education, February 2021).
6	“I feel that the FASFA, the Pell Grants, that’s—I would say that the Pell Grant came from the FASFA, and the Horizons Book

	Program and the BOG Waiver were absolutely helpful and useful. I definitely utilized those for as long as I could, so I was really able to use FASFA throughout my entire undergrad career". (Resources for Education, February 2021).
7	"Yes, I did use the bog waiver. They were very useful because money was tight at the time as it was, and I was able to attend my classes and have my classes paid for". (Resources for Education, February 2021)
8	"Financial Aid. There was a group that was a foster youth group, and they were called independent living program. They aided me in having an apartment and trying to show us how to financially be independent. They'd get us an apartment, and they would pay for portions of the rent, and furnish it. That was a very good resource". (Resources for Education, February 2021).
9	"The EOPS and EOP—there's EOPS at community college, and then I was in EOP for my bachelor's, and that was really helpful because the renaissance scholars, they do different events. They had a food pantry at my community college". (Resources for Education, February 2021).
10	"Financial aid, and then I was gonna apply to the—what was it called—the NextUp program". (Resources for Education, February 2021).

Table 3 displays quotes directly from transcripts, participants discuss resources provided.

Table 4. Direct Quote Regarding Early Discussion of Education

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Early Discussion of Education
1	"At my home, yes. Higher education was always discussed... yes. If it wasn't addressed in my home, it was definitely addressed in school to definitely pursue higher education". (Early Discussion of Education, January 2021).
2	"Yes, here and there [regarding higher education]. It was always kind of the focus, like you need to do good in school. You need to go to college so you can do good for yourself". (Early Discussion of Education, January 2021).
3	"No."

	(Early Discussion of Education, January 2021).
4	“Only by my uncle. No one in my family knew about higher education. Social workers never talked to me about higher education. Foster parents, either, because at that time I was 10...Then when I started goin’, I realized how it could help me, but before that, I didn’t really know what college meant, or what an education meant, or what a career meant”. (Early Discussion of Education, January 2021).
5	“My sister mentioned it to me, but that was it”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
6	“Yes. Higher education was actually discussed in both my home and the foster placement...my dad has always been—has always discussed higher education with me”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
7	“Higher education was never really mentioned in my home or actually with my social worker”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
8	“By my ILP mentor, my independent living program mentor, but not from my foster guardians or anything”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
9	“Higher education was discussed to me while I was in foster care. My social worker handed me resources and provided a educational liaison for me, so, yeah”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
10	“You know, I can't recall specific conversations, so I'm not really sure. I think it was just something I always wanted to do, and I was encouraged to do that”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).
11	“Probably, no, not really. They really didn't really want to push their own ideals us. They pretty much wanted us to choose our own path...I would have to ask her [social worker], and when I did ask her, she referred me to an education liaison from the county”. (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).

In table 4 participants explored the discussion of higher education in their placements.

Table 5. Direct Quote Regarding Professional and Personal Support System

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Professional and Personal Support System
1	“Well, my support system was definitely my family. If it wasn't school that was telling me to get a higher education, it was definitely my family... blood relatives”. (Professional and Personal Support System, January 2021).
2	“Yes, 100 percent. I constantly have support from my family, and then my close friends always encouraged me to do better”. (Professional and Personal Support System, January 2021).
3	“No...yeah, I had a friend that would take me to school every day. That was what kept me going to school”. (Professional and Personal Support System, January 2021).
4	"...I think the lack of family support; having a good support system was one of my barriers, because I'm not very close to my family”. (Professional and Personal Support System, January 2021).
5	“Yeah, my sister”. (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).
6	“Yes. I would say that the support system was probably a little bit smaller, only because I'm an only child and come from a single-parent household, but my dad was very supportive, along with my closest friends, as I was achieving higher education. Even still now, the support system remains the same”. (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).
7	“I didn't really have a support system from my social worker or my foster parents as well, but I did have more of a support system from my friend and her mom”. (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).
8	“It was my mentor, my program director. Those were my two main, I would say, and my counselor from school. Those are my three main”. (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).
9	“A reason why I never pursued an educational path until recently was because I did not have... the social support to motivate me in that path...I do now. It consists of my sisters and my current boyfriend”. (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).

10	"...I would say that there was definitely a lack of support of maybe a unit or group to—well, I guess not". (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).
11	"...My uncle also is a big support system to me, because, yeah, he teaches me about regular adult stuff, "adulting" stuff...I think the whole school, Cal State San Bernardino, offers a lot of support".(Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).

In table 5 participants identify their support systems in a professional and personal setting.

Table 6: Direct Quote Regarding Recommendations for Social Workers

Participant #	Direct Quote Regarding Recommendations for Social Workers
1	"I definitely believe that social workers should provide more mental health assistance. It's definitely a big thing. Even though I was probably like around seven years old at the time, I feel like it would have been a lot more helpful, even as a seven-year-old, if I had some assistance around my emotions". (Recommendations for Social Workers, January 2021).
2	"...I personally can't think of anything that could be done better or that anything was done incorrectly, in my experience". (Recommendations for Social Workers, January 2021).
3	"I would say just providing the outlet to the foster youth to be able to look for the resource when they need the help. I mean, basically, I've seen that when you do look for it and you reach out, it's there. Also, I mean, I guess accountability as well, like for the foster youth. At that time, the programs were kind of new, so I feel it was just kind of like a free-for-all kind of thing". (Recommendations for Social Workers, January 2021).
4	"I think a lot of it has to do with policies. I think, because they can't give you the money you need, that's more of a policy/government thing. Then, I think just maybe talking to talking to the youth, even when they're 10, just talking to them about college, and giving them that knowledge about it as an option". (Recommendations for Social Workers, January 2021).

5	“I think the biggest thing is being attentive to your individual cases with everyone, because often times, when I was moving through foster homes, one of the biggest issues that was always occurring between the foster parents and the foster kids was that it was very hard to communicate or get ahold of the social workers...I feel like social workers should probably give more resources...”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
6	“I think them helping me through the process of getting grants and stuff like that with my money issues, I think that would help or could help”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
7	“...Social workers can do to help foster youth is absolutely go into situations with a trauma-informed lens. I think that without looking at foster youth and the barriers and the situations that they faced...there is no way to help the foster youth if their trauma has not been accounted for”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
8	“I guess, help 'em out with more—ask, "do you have any questions with school," or if they can bring up the college thing more. Provide them with resources as well. Where they can reach out to or just in general help more with college”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
9	“I don't know if it's what social workers can do, but what our government can do for our social workers, period”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
10	“I believe that social workers are overworked. I understand they have a high caseload, so it was difficult for them to provide proper resources for me during the beginning stages of my college education”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).
11	“...Providing a little bit more assistance with mental help and therapy... another thing was how”. (Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).

In table 6 participants express their opinions on social workers improving barriers in the child welfare system.

Summary

Through interviewing many current and former foster youth students on their perspectives and experiences they've encountered while attending, attempted, and/or completed higher education some of the themes that arose were multiple barriers, resources utilized, improving services within social workers in child welfare, internal and external support systems, and discussions surrounding higher education in placement. This research aimed to collect personal experiences among these individuals and the barriers they have faced while attending, attempted, and/or completed a higher education. Demographic information of interviewees was presented as well. Further explanation and in-depth analysis of the components identified as barriers will be analyzed in the next section.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This section will discuss and analyze the five core ideas and themes that were discovered from the study, ideas about the barriers, resources for education, early discussion of education, professional and personal support systems, and participant's recommendations for social workers. Additionally, this chapter addresses recommendations for social work practice and further research for future social workers and other professionals.

After further analysis of data, the study introduced several ideas and themes that were common among current and former foster youth students. The study discovered similarities among participants of all ages and genders. All participants identified the barriers associated with the impacts of being in foster care and its relevance to higher education. Transitional youth or foster youth in this research is described as a foster child or youth who is under the age of 21 (in California) who has been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian. The youth enter the Child Welfare System, becomes a ward of the state, and is placed under the supervision of a certified Resource Parent/s home that fosters adolescents. The exposure of being removed from a parent or guardian and being placed in the foster care system plays a significant role in the lives of these participants.

Ideas about the Barriers

In the study, ideas about the barriers foster youth face are interpreted as obstacles that impede foster youth who are working towards the path of higher education. Mental health issues have been shown to have a significant effect on the barrier's transitional youth encounter during campus life. Which impact students' physical, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal functioning (Jackson et al., 2019). From the information collected, two main barriers were discovered: participants identified a higher need for mental health services and financial instability is a burden that continues to affect those in the foster care system. For example, participant 1 discussed,

that the foster care system definitely created a barrier in my mental health. I feel like the trauma of being in foster care doesn't allow me to remember much (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).

Participant 2 expressed how he definitely says the biggest one [barrier] that's standing out would be, definitely, mental health. I guess a few others, but not as much as the mental health (Ideas about the Barriers, January 2021).

Participant 7 stated, I guess the biggest barrier would probably be more mental health issues (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).

These participants identified mental health as a barrier while achieving higher education. The lack of mental health services that was inadequately provided and the trauma they underwent created a barrier to their educational goals. The

history of complex trauma, constantly changing placements, broken family relationships, insufficient and inadequate access to mental health services, and the over-prescription of psychotropic drugs are all factors that contribute to the mental and behavioral health of these youth in foster care. The idea that mental health issues may play a part in higher education among transitional youth suggests that mental health clinicians need to intervene early before foster youth head to higher education. This might imply that foster youth need to be screened adequately for mental health before assessing educational potential. It seems consistent with the idea that the prevalence of mental health issues has always been a part of foster youth care.

Additionally, it might imply students who arrive to campuses with mental health concerns may utilize routine care such as emergency services, 24-hour rapid response, and general counseling. This might imply the need to incorporate a more diverse support staff that will aide with the cultural divide with the student body on campuses. This seems consistent with the idea that this intervention can potentially alleviate mental health barriers for students who are struggling to seek support. Overall, mental health might be a key to understanding how foster youth and mental health services might provide educators and institutions with a better understanding of their performance.

Financial Instability

In this study, participants identified financial instability to be a barrier to achieving higher education. Participants identified financial instability to be

interpreted as a shortage of funds while attending to their education. The lack of financial assistance is an obstacle that leads to the problems that this population encounter. For example, participant 6 discussed,

I would say some barriers that I encountered were mostly financial instability (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).

Participant 9 explained,

A reason why I never pursued an educational path until recently was because I did not have the financial stability to afford college or the social support to motivate me in that path (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).

Participant 11 explained,

I did have a couple barriers. There was one, financially [barrier]... (Ideas about the Barriers, February 2021).

These participants discussed financial instability as a barrier that may have ultimately affected their educational path towards completing their academic attainment. It might suggest that these foster youth, may have utilized financial resources, however, these same financial resources might not have been enough for their success during their educational path.

This indicates these youth had to choose between their higher education or meeting their essential needs to live independently. It might imply that although these resources benefit some students, it merely touches the surface to help those in need for living necessities while achieving higher education. It

indicates that room and board, food, and financial poverty are all too prevalent among students (Whitman, 2018). The research indicates that it would be inaccurate to accept that foster youth would not be exposed to food and housing insecurity when they age out of foster care, given their questions about financial support (Whitman, 2018).

It is compatible with the idea that financial instability is one of the key themes to understanding why foster youth students are graduating at lower rates compared to their counterparts. These financial barriers are conducive to challenges facing these transitional youth in their pursuit of education. The lack of financial support for this demographic may be due to a lack of parental support. Moreover, many foster youths may not be exposed to financial security and healthy financial conduct because it may not be taught in their homes or placements. Many of these foster youth, may be less likely to have a constant source of funds. It may imply that the child welfare agency will want to develop youth services to support this population in order to set goals that are practical for these transitional youth who have limited financial support. When trying to achieve good results for this population, programs would better support these youth by growing their financial literacy, enhancing financial practices, information on credit scores, or boosting positive psychosocial results, instead of solely focusing on accumulating significant savings and assets.

Resources for Education

In the study, ideas about resources for education are interpreted as assets and/or aides provided by the college institution or government assistance to students that are actively working to alleviate economic, mental, educational services. The resources discussed have provided ample information on some constructive impacts on these foster youth when it comes to the experiences that aided the youth. For example, participant 1 discussed,

I partake in the foster aide program, which does give me resources, and they are useful. They give me—they give me funds to buy my textbooks, and they give me funds for certain things like supplies, and then as well as if I'm in need of computer resources or internet resources, they try their best to find out if they can help me for that (Resources for Education, January 2021)

For example, participant 2 stated,

Yes, I did use the bog waiver. They were very useful because money was tight at the time as it was, and I was able to attend my classes and have my classes paid for (Resources for Education, January 2021).

For example, participant 3 explained,

Financial Aid [resource]. There was a group that was a foster youth group, and they were called the Independent Living Program. They aided me in having an apartment and trying to show us how to financially be independent. They'd get us an apartment, and they would pay for portions

of the rent, and furnish it. That was a very good resource (Resources for Education, January 2021).

For example, participant 4 stated,

The EOPS and EOP—there's EOPS at community college, and then I was in EOP for my bachelor's, and that was really helpful because the Renaissance Scholars, they do different events. They had a food pantry at my community college (Resources for Education, January 2021).

Given the insight of the participants regarding the resources they have utilized for their education, a majority of the participants utilized financial resources. It might imply although these resources are beneficial for foster youth, more resources are still needed among this population. It overturns the literature because foster youth face many obstacles that necessitate additional assistance. Most of these foster youth grow up in troubled homes which may cause developmental delays and a higher need for resources after the age of twenty-one. Unsurprisingly, many of these youth continue to have hardships even after they leave the foster care system. It might imply the need for further discussion and awareness surrounding foster youth since they are a vulnerable population. With being a vulnerable population, it is noted there is a high prevalence that many foster youths may become homeless, addicted to substances, and become pregnant at a young age if not provided the appropriate resources to overcome their hardships. This is telling as the chances of these youth graduating in higher education becomes less of a reality. It seems consistent with the idea that

although foster youth will benefit from additional resources it would also imply the need to reinvest and redirect funds and resources early on. The shift from focusing on earlier interventions should be on these youths rather than the institutions that can potentially harm them. It indicates that when foster youth are invested across the board the chances of success are at a higher rate.

Early Discussion of Education

In this study, ideas about the early discussion of education are interpreted as conversations regarding higher education whether it was with their caregivers, relatives, or with their assigned county social worker. It provides insight into discussions surrounding the importance of higher education in their assigned placements. It seems to provide possible answers to the question, as to the low percentage of foster youth who transition from high school to college to further education.

For example, participant 6 discussed,

Yes. Higher education was actually discussed in both my home and the foster placement...my dad has always been—has always discussed higher education with me (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).

For example, participant 7 stated,

Higher education was never really mentioned in my home or actually with my social worker (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).

For example, participant 8 discussed,

By my ILP mentor, my Independent Living Program mentor, but not from my foster guardians or anything (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).

For example, participant 9 stated,

Higher education was discussed to me while I was in foster care. My social worker handed me resources and provided an educational liaison for me, so, yeah (Early Discussion of Education, February 2021).

According to the participants, they discuss while caregivers, relatives, and county social workers provided a minimal amount of discussion and awareness of higher education, there were participants who did not share the same experiences.

These participants described there was a lack of conversation from trustworthy adults that could have explored and provided insight into higher education options. It seems to indicate having meager knowledge on ideas of higher education would essentially decrease overall success rates for these youths.

It ties into our research question because it suggests that without having these conversations it adds an additional obstacle that these youth have to overcome. It could indicate that the awareness of having these discussions in their placements with their caregivers or county social workers will prompt foster youth to ask consistent questions regarding higher education. Having these discussions may build a foundation that will discontinue cycles of intergenerational trauma these foster youth have faced. Multiple surveys from previous studies have shown that higher education has numerous advantages

including greater career satisfaction, greater income opportunities, higher health quality, and lower consumption of substances, and incarceration rates as compared to those who do not attend college (Salazar, 2013). Setting these building blocks from the start of placement may enhance comprehension of topics of education and a higher quality of life.

Professional and Personal Support System

In this study, ideas about professional and personal support systems are interpreted as a group of people who provide practical or emotional support to the participants, these people consist of family members, friends, mentors, high school personnel, and county social workers. The participants discussed the significance of professional and personal support from personnel who provided intelligence, assistance, and encouragement that laid the groundwork for them to reflect about higher education as a possibility regarding their academic success.

For example, participant 4 expressed,

...I think the lack of family support; having a good support system was one of my barriers because I'm not very close to my family (Professional and Personal Support System, January 2021).

For example, participant 6 discussed,

Yes. I would say that the support system was probably a little bit smaller, only because I'm an only child and come from a single-parent household, but my dad was very supportive, along with my closest friends, as I was

achieving higher education. Even still now, the support system remains the same (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).

For example, participant 8 stated,

It was my mentor, my program director. Those were my two main, I would say, and my counselor from school. Those are my three main (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).

For example, participant 9 discussed,

A reason why I never pursued an educational path until recently was that I did not have... the social support to motivate me in that path... I do now. It consists of my sisters and my current boyfriend (Professional and Personal Support System, February 2021).

Given the insight of these participants regarding ideas about professional and personal support systems, a majority of the participants identified to have familial and professional support systems, other participants were limited to both professional and familial support systems. These participants discussed the benefits of having a support system which provided insight into the idea of intrinsic motivation. It implies that a lack of support system creates a barrier to achieving forms of educational attainment. It seems consistent with the idea that in order to alleviate this barrier an early intervention is needed by county social workers and peer mentors. One example, is county social workers can provide various avenues of support by providing numerous existing networks of resources for foster youth to instill intrinsic motivation to achieve higher

education. These resources can be individualized for their own specific needs to meet their highest potential since each foster youth is exceptional in their own right.

Another example may be the lack of professional and familial support, this might imply the need for a new set of policies and practices in regards to connecting professional and peer mentors to foster youth. This might indicate a positive initiative to increase support networks. It ties into our research question because it suggests that maintaining a healthy support net has many beneficial effects, including higher levels of well-being, improved coping skills, and living a fuller and happier life (Okpych, Park, Feng, Torres-Garcia, & Courtney, 2018). Social reinforcement has also been found in studies to alleviate depression and anxiety, this suggests that a consistent support structure can frequently aid in stress reduction (Okpych et al., 2018).

Participants Recommendations for Social Workers

In this study, participants gave insight into their ideas regarding recommendations for county social workers in the child welfare sector as well as recommendations within child welfare agencies.

As participant 1 states, I definitely believe that social workers should provide more mental health assistance. It's definitely a big thing. Even though I was probably like around seven years old at the time, I feel like it would have been a lot more helpful, even as a seven-year-old, if I had

some assistance around my emotions (Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, January 2021).

As participant 11 expressed, "...Providing a little bit more assistance with mental help and therapy..." (Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021). Mental health resources are one of the common themes that was frequently expressed to be a barrier. Some participants expressed when interviewed, they were not offered or given the opportunity to attain mental health services. As participant 6 discussed, "I think them [social workers] helping me through the process of getting grants and stuff like that with my money issues, I think that would help or could help" (Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, Participant 6, February 2021). Participant 8 explained, "I guess, help 'em out with more—ask, "do you have any questions with school," or if they [social workers] can bring up the college thing more. Provide them [foster youth] with resources as well. Where they can reach out to or just in general help more with college (Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021). It might imply county social workers within child welfare agencies have a unique role in ensuring that foster youth aging-out of the foster care system have the opportunity to thrive.

Participant 7 mentions Social workers can help foster youth go into situations with a trauma-informed lens. I think that without looking at foster youth and the barriers and the situations that they faced...there is no way

to help the foster youth if their trauma has not been accounted for
(Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, February 2021).

This participant provides insight into the recommendations and need for providing education for the foster youth population to learn more about trauma informed care. It might suggest the impact of frequent foster placements combined with increased need for education services, the side effects of trauma, and common responses to the foster youth's behavior further identify their experience. It also illustrates the need to examine the efficacy of our current efforts in regards to social work practice.

Furthermore, understanding trauma informed care has a significant effect on a student's physical, mental, and cognitive growth, and that it affects the majority of kindergarten to 12th grade foster youth students (Berardi & Morton, 2017). This gives a concrete context as to why many children fail to be academically and socially successful in school. It seems consistent with the idea change is needed; institutions will continue to produce dismal results that will continue to impact foster youth in most vulnerable school districts (Berardi & Morton, 2017).

Recommendations for Social Work Research, Policy and Practice

Research

The ideas discussed attempted to identify the barriers that are preventing foster youth from achieving higher education and have applied them to social work practice. However, in order to alleviate the barriers, foster youth face while

achieving higher education further research must be done. One recommendation is to expand this study to incorporate county social workers' perspectives on their experiences when working alongside transitional foster youth and the resources they are provided with. In addition, when expanding this research, the need for more experiences is required to fully grasp the voices of transitional youth who encounter these challenges in their transition from high school. This would shed light on the depth and breadth of the disconnect between foster youth and existing resources for higher education and how that translates into social work practice in the field and in agencies across the board.

The current study highlights that this phenomenon is not exclusive to just foster youth but county social workers who work with transitional foster youth as well. Continuing this same thought, research would greatly assist foster youth and social workers understand this topic more effectively, would be to identify other possible barriers foster youth face while obtaining a higher education. As discussed in the literature review, foster youth are yet faced with additional challenges when it comes to achieving their educational attainment. However, there is more than just literature out there that can speak on these barriers and challenges. Some participants from this research who have attempted or are in the process of obtaining higher education, can speak on their experiences on the barriers they are currently facing or have faced. In gathering information from participants like these, the social work field and further education can identify, generally, what is causing this population to graduate at sufficient lower rates

than their counterparts and what other resources are needed. This would be a beneficial area of an exploratory study that could assist the social work field and higher education institutions to take legitimate measures towards reducing barriers when achieving higher education.

Social Work Practice

When exploring social work practice, a recommendation this study proposes is the need to incorporate trauma informed care into the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) curriculum in the bachelors and master's programs. Incorporating trauma informed care into the social work curriculum, would benefit incoming social workers in the field. This allows social workers to apply their knowledge on all sectors of social work to be well prepared and informed on how to assist vulnerable populations on all systems of micro, mezzo, macro levels when it comes to the impacts of trauma and adversity.

As one participant discussed Social workers can help foster youth go into situations with a trauma-informed lens. I think that without looking at foster youth and the barriers and the situations that they faced...there is no way to help the foster youth if their trauma has not been accounted for (Participants Recommendations for Social Workers, Participant 7, February 2021).

This curriculum will assist social work students on trauma informed care in all systems to ensure a good foundation on awareness in all aspects of physical, social, and emotional safety in these populations.

Conclusion

Understanding the research on the perspectives of foster youth on the barriers they face while attempted/attempting or completed higher education offers the opportunity to bring awareness to this population's experiences. Participants identified a higher need for mental health services, financial instability is a burden that continues to affect those in the foster care system, and a lack of social support in both familial and in the child welfare system are barriers to the foster youth population. Social workers and other professionals working with the foster youth population must be aware of these barriers that continue to affect and decrease higher education rates. Therefore, former and current foster youth students' perspectives on the barriers they face while attempted/attempting or completed higher education continue to be present. Discussing the awareness of the impacts of these barriers to this vulnerable population will increase the paradigm on the academic success rates.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

November 23, 2020

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2021-90

Thomas Davis Bianca Rivera. Aileen Lopez
CSBS Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Thomas Davis Bianca Rivera, Aileen Lopez:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "PERSPECTIVES ON THE BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY FOSTER YOUTH AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSO, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. Important Note: This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the Office of Academic Research website for more information at <https://www.csusb.edu/academic-research>.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study. Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your ethnicity?
2. What gender do you identify as?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your current or former Major or field of study?
5. How many years of higher education have you completed?
6. As a recipient of the foster care system, what barrier (mental health, substance abuse, financial instability or stability, university personnel assistance, and social support or other) has impacted positively or negatively your educational path, and why?
7. In your experience during the time of applying, completing or in completion of higher education, what resources were provided to you?
8. Which resources did or do you utilize, and were they useful? Why or why not?
9. In your experience, was higher education a discussion addressed in your home or foster placement?
10. Did you have a support system while achieving higher education?
11. What can social workers do to improve the barriers that foster youth face in the foster care system?
12. Are there any additional resources that would be helpful to you now and for future students in foster care?
13. Is there anything you would like to add or change with these resources?

Created by: Bianca Rivera and Aileen Ramirez Lopez

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to give foster youth students a voice in their education to increase academic success rates. The study is being conducted by Aileen Lopez and Bianca Rivera, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Davis, a Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to give current and former foster youth students a voice in their education to increase academic success rates.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked questions on demographics, questions regarding their academic success, and their perspectives on obstacles they have faced during academia.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 30 to 40 minutes to complete the interview questionnaire.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. **CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Davis at tomdavis@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after June 2021

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I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

Place an X mark here

Date

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPATION FLYER

Were you in Foster Care?

Interested in participating in a research study?

Eligibility

Must have been placed in foster care (other than relatives home)

Must have applied, attempted or completed a higher education

Ages: 18-40



What is involved in this study?

10 short interview questions regarding the perspectives on the barriers faced while attending a higher education (i.e. CC, University)

Incentive

In exchange for your time and completing the interview study, you will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card

Our Goal

Gather information on the barriers foster youth face in hopes to increase academic success

Location

Via Zoom or phone call

ARE YOU INTERESTED?

Contact Bianca Rivera or Aileen Lopez at CSUSBfosteryouthresearch@gmail.com

Approved by the CSUSB Institutional Review Board

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