RESILIENCY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITIONING FROM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

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RESILIENCY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITIONING FROM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

RESILIENCY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FORMER FOSTER YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITIONING FROM THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

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This exploratory study examined resiliency in foster youth exiting the child welfare system. Participants included 33 emancipated foster youth who completed an online survey using the Resiliency 14 Scale and the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale. Research findings indicated that the majority of emancipated foster youth demonstrated moderately high to high levels of resilience. Males had statistically significant higher resiliency scores than females, and African Americans had higher social support scores than other races/ethnicities although the difference only approached statistical significance. Greater social support was found to significantly correlate with higher resiliency scores. The researcher’s hypothesis that former foster youth who participated in an independent living program (ILP) would demonstrate higher resiliency and greater social support than those who did not was not supported. However, those who participated in an ILP did have higher social support and the relationship between participation in an ILP and resiliency approached statistical significance.

The research findings reflect the need for increased attention to examining various resiliency factors associated with emancipated foster youths’ successful transition from the child welfare system. It is important to develop realistic and successful independent
living programs for these youth. In addition, other approaches need to be examined and
developed to help with the many challenges that emancipated foster youth face.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Maura O’Keefe, Ph.D., L.C.S.W.

______________________________
Date
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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Despite the odds, many foster youth are faced with harsh realities. Some of the challenges that they are presented with at the age of 18 are lacking permanency and family connections. Without feeling attached to someone or something because of early family bonding disruptions these key familial connections tend to lead some foster youth down the road of high-risk behaviors. Some of the high-risk behaviors may be incarceration, drugs and alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases and high-risk pregnancies. In addition, they may struggle with symptoms of mental illness, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse and dependency, substance abuse and substance dependency.

The lack of a high school education, along with minimal social skills and life skills, tends to limit these youth chances to become successful in the world. These vulnerable emancipated youth have needs differ than non-foster youth, 18 year olds who still reside at home with their parents. Remarkably, in the face of adversity, along with limited resources, many foster youth exiting foster care contain a coherent level of self-efficacy in which gives them the drive to remain focus. Nevertheless, many foster youth emancipates the system with challenges and manages to become resilient individuals. In general, the resilient individual is represented in research as “the psychologically healthy person” (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996, p. 190). These resilient individuals according to
the definition have found a way “to rise above their adversities and adjust successfully to a number of situations.”

This researcher explored the resiliency factors that foster youth face upon emancipation. As social workers working with foster youth in a non-profit organizational setting, they have experienced many of their clients aging out of the system with limited resources available to aid them in transitioning successfully. There have been many client discharges in which social workers in non-profit organizations have found it to be necessary to collaborate with each other especially during the current economic downturn to assist foster youth with their emancipation process from Child Protective Services.

There is no one particular pathways that lead an individual down a successful road. However, there are some tangible and intangible tools that some foster youth have used to catapult put them on a successful road in which all roads lead to disaster or a sense of no hope. According to Yin, 2004 the concept of resilience centers around one’s ability to overcome and adapt to challenging or threatening experiences. Many of the subgroups within this population are notorious for becoming resilient due to society’s overall treatment of the poor, as well as lower class individuals. These individuals may have experienced many cycles of poverty that they eventually possessed a resistance or find a way to thrive in life such as pursuing education, obtaining a job. However, self-efficacy is different from self-esteem in which self efficacy focuses on self-empowerment. In the past several years, this writer worked with many foster youth entering the only shelter called the Children’s Receiving Home within months aging out
of the foster care system with no resources, and homeless. These youth can sign up for a transitional living program or shelter once they are officially homeless for one day. After turning 18 foster youth are allowed to sign them out of the Child Welfare System.

As a result, this researcher would advocate for youth who were on the brink of homelessness, pregnancy etc. Many foster youth waiting to emancipate experience high anxiety about aging out of the system although it was one of the many conversations that they elaborated on all the time. This writer was recognized by both the county social worker and the shelter for assisting in finding housing for a 18-year-old African American male who needed a place to stay as well as completing his education. At the time, this 18 year old exhibited annoying negative behaviors in which no one wanted to deal with at the time. The foster youth was grateful in which he represented a second generation living in a shelter environment. Upon this experience working as an intake counselor in a shelter environment led this researcher to take an initiative to investigate how can foster youth emancipate from the foster care system successfully.

As a result, this writer begins to attend meetings with the Sacramento County Independent Living Program and found that many youth are not connected to the appropriate services. In reality, there were not enough services to go around for many of the foster youth. Emancipating foster youth, is a vulnerable population with many needs. The Child Welfare System has failed these foster youth while they were in foster care as well as after exiting the foster care system. There are many challenges such as education, employment, mental health and alcohol and drug issues. There are systemic policies,
funding and continuity of care problems. For example, legislation has increased funding for emancipated foster youth after 18; however no one seems to exactly know how the funds will be used to help these youth. In addition, during economic downturn even more organizations including the schools needs to continue to collaborate to find adequate help to assist with foster youth transitioning successfully.

**Background Information**

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System often abbreviated as AFCARS (2005) states that approximately 513,000 children in foster care in the United States. Taylor (2005) reports that of the children entering the foster care system, 53% due to neglect, 26% due to physical abuse, 14% due to sexual abuse and 5% due to emotional abuse. Many of the foster youth social and educational opportunities are hampered by areas of consistency, continuity and stability. Due to the above mentioned deficits, they have a strong tendency to hinder these young people from making successful transitions towards independence after leaving the child welfare system (Mendes, 2006). In 2005, of the 513,000 children in foster care, 97,470 of them are between the ages of 16-18 awaiting emancipation (AFCARS, 2005).

The Department of Health and Human Services (2006) states that roughly 20,000 youth emancipate from the foster care system every year with the vague assumption that they are ready to function as independent adults. Consequently, many of these youth who emancipate out of the foster care system are not adequately trained to become independent adults, and depending on their living situation may not have given the
opportunity to attend workshops through the Independent Living Programs. The Jim Casey Family Foundation who now works closely with the Child Welfare System in Sacramento found consistent alarming statistics throughout their research. The report found that twenty percent will become homeless after the age of 18, 58% of foster youth lack a high school education compared to 87% of non foster youth. In addition, less than 3% have their college degrees. Moreover, 25% of foster youth are incarcerated within the first two years after leaving the foster care system.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Oftentimes, when foster youth exit the child welfare system they cannot solely rely upon their family members for support, consequently, they rely on the state to assume parental responsibility to help them transition into adulthood (Children’s Advocacy Institute, 2007; Courtney & Heuring, 2005). However, in the process of assisting emancipated foster youth into transition into adulthood, states are struggling especially during the current economic downturn to meet the needs of the increasing financial burden for foster youth who aged out of the child welfare system (Child Welfare League of America, Georgiades, 2005). Despite, this dilemma, a small percentage of emancipated foster youth have utilized resiliency to help them to transition successfully out of the child welfare system.

**Purpose of the Study**

The primary focus of this project is to understand the resiliency factors that promote independent living skills as well as bring awareness of the significance of
resilience among successful emancipated youth and how vital it is to continue support and funding Independent Living Program of Sacramento County. This project, the author chose social system theory, and risk and resiliency theory. This project utilized two different theoretical frameworks because these frameworks provide explanations of how systems interact with their environment. In addition, risk and resiliency factors were important to show how this model influences the foster youth population in their transition to adulthood.

**Theoretical Framework**

The system theory originated from the biological theory, in which is based on the premise that all systems are composed of subsystems, which are made of larger systems (Payne, 2005). The systems theory focuses on individuals (micro level), families and groups (mezzo level), as well as organizations and societies (macro level). This theory focused on the people’s relationships, and how they interact to one another and ultimately work together. The systems theory operates on the premise that there are three helping systems. They are formal (community) ad informal (friends & family) as well as societal systems (schools) (Payne, 2005). If in place, these systems act as a buffer for negative consequences. Several studies suggest that foster youth experience stressful relationship with one or all of these systems (Courtney et al., 2007; Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005). The systems theory focuses on the relationship of the individuals with their environment. It is important to view the foster youth interactions between the youth and their environment as they transition into independent living.
This perspective is used to explain the relationship between the foster youth and their transition into independence (Roberts, 2004). Many foster youth struggle daily to find their true identity within a system that does not allow for it. The ecological perspective provides the youth to experience their sense of self via the foster youth support system. As the foster youth prepares transition to adulthood his/her support system may change to prepare the foster youth to live on his/her own.

**Risk and Resiliency Model**

The risk and resiliency theory is based on system theory that describes the interactions between the individual and his environment. The purpose of this theory describes how both positive and negative outcomes as well as protective factors influence the individual. During the process of transitioning into adulthood, research indicates that foster youth may encounter more risk factors than the youth in the general population. Some risk factors that influence foster youth may include childhood disorders, trauma, and multiple placements. Protective factors that influence foster youth are their individual or personal qualities and social influences. Individual qualities include traits and learned behavior; the social influences are developed through the ecological factors (Richman & Fraser, 2001).

Research suggests that foster youth who aged out of the system are at high risk for negative outcomes, which is why it is important to look at whether resiliency has helped those who have successfully exited the child welfare system. Fraser (2004) foster youth experience may experience more stress during transitioning to adulthood due to their lack
of emotional and financial support suggesting that they are in dire need of protective factors to be in place in their adolescence phases of development. Each individual experience will be different. Each individual experience will be different. Resiliency is considered a type of coping mechanism, it is necessary to identify both positives and negative types of risk and resiliency factors that foster youth are more likely to develop. Decreasing risky behaviors, such as drug use, lack of educational attainment, early parenthood and increasing positive forms of resiliency the chances of achieving self-sufficiency are increased.

**Research Questions/Hypotheses**

This study explored the following four research questions: R1: How resilient are former foster youth who emancipate out of the child welfare system? R2: Is there a relationship between resiliency and social support for these foster youth? R3: Do former foster youth who participated in the Independent Living Program (ILP) demonstrate more resiliency than those who did not participate in ILP? R4: What are the differences in socio demographic characteristics and aging out experiences that are related to patterns of resilience?

Based on the review of literature, the researcher explores the following hypotheses: H1: There will be a small percentage of emancipated foster youth with average to high cognitive abilities of these youth will have a greater capacity to demonstrate resiliency. These youth tend to focus on education, on the job training or both. H2: There is a significant relationship between resiliency and social support for
former foster youths, that is, youth who demonstrate greater resilience have greater social support. H3: Foster youth who attended an ILP will demonstrate greater resiliency and have greater social support than foster youth who did not attend an ILP. H4: In respect to gender is disproportionately, female. There exist a higher number of males, specifically, African American males aging out of the child welfare system. Based on societal changes, gender difference is on the rise in which there will be an increase of transgender in the foster care system.

**Definition of Terms**

Aging Out refers to the age one is considered a legal adult, while gaining full legal rights, and being discharged from county care. In general, a foster youth ages out at 18. A foster youth can remain in care with the stipulation that they will graduate by their 19th birthday to complete their high school education.

At-risk factors: Instability that accompanies long periods of out of home placement during childhood and adolescence. The experiences may lead these youth to a more likelihood for unemployment poor educational outcomes, early parenthood, increased rates of incarceration and homelessness (CWLA, 2007).

Child Protective Services (CPS): County based services which provide specialized support and Intervention services for neglected and abused children and their families (Brittain & Hunt, 2004).

Emancipated youth: Youth that have been set free from legal, social, or political restraint (Legal Definitions, 2007). A youth can emancipate after 16, if they present
their case in front of the courts. In most cases, typically foster youth emancipate at the age of eighteen or when they graduate from high school.

Family Support: It is refer to as a positive relationship established in which the child and the family receive care from extended family relations or a formal or informal network.

Foster youth: Youth who are in protective custody and reside in foster homes, kinship homes or group homes. Foster care: Foster care is a planned and time limited alternative living arrangement for children whose parents are unstable to care for them at home for a period of time (Legal Definitions, 2007).

Homelessness: Defined as not having a stable living arrangement for over 20 days in the past six months. Independent living: A living arrangement without the assistance of an adult or caretaker. The ability to live on their own including the ability to plan a budget, cook, clean, work or go to school without the support of others.

Independent Living Skills Program: A county program that helps to teach foster youth the skills needed to live independently; in order to gain life skills.

Resilience: The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Assumptions

This research study makes the assumption that the participants in the study offer valid responses that will provide a better understanding if emancipated foster youth are resilient. This exploratory study aims to identify contributing factors that are linked to
resiliency factors among foster youth. The goal is to utilize the current programs that is organized for foster youth and linked the youth to appropriate services.

**Justification**

The preamble of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) states in the *Codes of Ethics* (2007) that the primary mission of the profession is to “enhance human well being” and give “particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (p. 1). This research study is necessary to gain an insight to whether or not resilience can help those who are abused and neglected should be assisted in a safe environment and create the protective factors that are needed to buffer against hardship as these youth attempt to discover new pathways of independence living skills through education and employment. As aforementioned in the social work preamble, it is the duty of the social work profession to empower those who are vulnerable. A clearer understanding is needed to promote resiliency, social supports and independent life skills among emancipated youth.

**Delimitation**

The population that was surveyed online for this study included youth who was previously in the foster care system. The study was conducted as a snowball sampling via survey monkey. The organization that conducted the study was Children’s Receiving Home of Sacramento. The information collected primarily apples to Sacramento, County, CA. In addition, due to the small sample size, this study is emancipated unable to control for other unidentified stressors associated with foster youth.
Summary

Chapter 1 of this project offered an introduction and background of the problem, a purpose for this study, the project research question and the theoretical frameworks utilized. In addition, chapter one includes definitions for terms used as well as assumptions, justifications and limitations of the project. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant and applicable literature. Chapter 3 offers an in-depth methodology that was used to complete this project. Chapter 4 presents the results of this project. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and recommendations. Chapter 5 also includes the implications for social work practices and policies.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The focus of this study is to look at resiliency factors among emancipated foster youth exiting the child welfare system. This is important because these emancipated youth have overcome the barriers that would prevent them from becoming successful in life. In this literature review, the author will also look at risk factors that could act as barriers that prevent foster youth from transitioning successfully as a young adult into the larger community. This review will be organized in five major sections. The first section will describe the transition from foster care to adulthood. The second will describe the aging-out process for foster youth. The third section will describe support programs to help emancipated youth in their transition from “aging out” of the foster care system. The fourth section will describe resiliency and how it relates to foster youth. The fifth section will describe the community support system (emotional/financial support) for the emancipated youth such as teachers, mentors, and others.

Transition to Adulthood

The process of any youth transitioning into adulthood is gradual and can be very challenging; it has been noted that today’s adolescents are not considered independent until the age of 26 (CAI, 2007). Foster youth face this challenging transition without familial support (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Furthermore, youth who grow and develop while in foster care, such as the child welfare system may, experience a difficult
transition into adulthood (Child Welfare League of America, 2003). Some of these youth are resilient in the way they bounce back, stabilize to a point of continuity of care, and become independent through education and employment.

Many former foster youth experience both challenges and needs while transitioning into Adulthood. Each year 20,000 to 25,000 youth emancipate from the foster system (Georgiades, 2005). One consistent factor that exists across the nation is that individual states struggle with the demand of needs presented by foster youth who age out each year. States may continue to provide limited resources for the nation’s emancipated youth; there is an estimation of 40,200 youth who receive aftercare each year (Georgiades, 2005). The Michigan State University School of Social work conducted a study to report on the status of foster care transition support for young people who are out of foster care. The report provided an overview of the challenges facing youth as well as the social and economic consequences involved regarding the failure to support these vulnerable youth. The findings from this study indicate that the state of Michigan, along with the nation, continues to see an increase in the number of youth both entering and transitioning from the child welfare system. During a time of tight budgets support for these youth has increased from legislators to educators as well as the general public. Despite these efforts, negative life outcomes still remain in the areas of education level, employment, homelessness, and involvement in the criminal justice system for former foster care youth at levels demonstrably higher than in the general population (Anderson, 2003).
Some emancipated youth become successful adults and find the means to take care of themselves. Many possess strengths, and continue to pursue higher education, keep stable employment, and build strong connections with positive family members or even establish a new family (Courtney, 2006). However, when any youth is faced with what appears to be insurmountable problems, they may find everything around them falling apart including housing.

Foster youth are part of a vulnerable population with distinctive needs that may require consistent and effective services in order to address. Services may vary from state to state, however promoting self-sufficiency among emancipated youth is important. The main forms of support required for self-sufficiency are promotion of education, life skills, and employment skills and pathways (Anderson, 2003). These appear to be the three sides of the triangle of success for foster youth. Meaningful, stable, well paid employment is linked to education and training beyond a high school diploma, and the ability to keep a job may depend on the application of life skills. In addition, the ability to find a good job may depend on networking which in turn may depend upon how the former foster youth is connected to a formal or informal group (Anderson, 2003). These areas will be further discussed later in the thesis.

The Study of Youth Emancipating from Care suggests that the desire to attend college can improve with educational opportunities (Needle, 2002). This study revealed the critical need for educational opportunities by comparing statistics regarding foster youth and their levels of college achievements.
In addition, an emancipated foster youth with limited income most likely develops his marketable skills through education and training. A study conducted by the Coalition for Independence through Education (CFITE) in 2002 includes an extensive cost-benefit analysis of the impact on people with low incomes when they have marketable job skills, obtained through education and job training. The study suggests that the state would save a considerable amount of money in the long run on support that is not paid out after low income wage earners become self-sufficient. For example, the state would save $6,696 (FY2000 data) annually in Child Day Care assistance per child in care. Other examples of services no longer required are Medicaid, food stamps, and energy assistance. In addition, the study cites FIA data that shows 4300 Family Independence Program (FIP) recipients enrolled in post secondary education. According to the Labor Statistics Unemployment and Earnings for Fulltime Workers Age 25 and Over by Educational Status table employment levels increase with the level of education, thus providing another tangible benefit to the state.

Other authors reported that 70% of Emancipated foster youth report a desire to attend college (CCSP, 2008). Needle (2002), further stated that 55% of emancipated youth attended community colleges; however, 40% did not earn credit. The reason for not receiving credit was that some students were registered for remedial or non credit classes. Fifteen percent of emancipated youth earned credits, 39% planned to transfer to a four-year university, but only 3% of the students who earned 56 or more units of credit could transfer to a four-year university or receive an associate degree.
Another critical side of the triangle of success is life skills. Most adults take for granted how to look for and apply for a job online, open a checking account, establish credit, live within a budget, and fill out a tax form. This is not true for all foster youth. In addition, social skills are needed to meet people and ask the right questions along with developing positive relationships and the self-esteem to believe that someone will find you worthy of hiring.

**Foster Youth Experiences on Challenges, Needs, Identity**

Foster youth must believe or see that they have a future in order to succeed. This is challenging when many former foster youth when growing up are forced to live in the moment, with no impetus to develop short or long term goals. Many foster youth are living for today, wondering whether their placement will end, or whether a new foster home will allow them to move to a new community or school. It is evident that many of these foster youth have a difficult time believing that they will have a bright future ahead of them. Unfortunately, study findings appear to suggest more negative experiences than positive ones when foster youth emancipate from state care (Mulkerns & Owens, 2008).

Former foster care youth in Michigan who attended college stated that their environment plays a large role in their success. These youth were interviewed, and they expressed that positive environmental factors included knowledge, encouragement by foster parents or group home staff, the quality of their school experience, and being thought of highly or encouraged by an adult that they respected such as a teacher.
Additionally, these former foster youth were provided with information that they needed to make informed decisions (Anderson, 2003).

Propp, Ortega, and Newheart (2003) stated that youth who have transitioned out of the foster care system are often overlooked and unprepared for the outside world. Many former foster youth indicated that as they approached adolescence, it became apparent to them that their birth families would not be “consistent support for them.” As a result, they believed that independent living, away from family, would definitely be the route that they would venture into. The youth who experience this particular shift from connection to self-sufficiency “often describe this transition as harsh and shocking” (McMillen, Rideout, Fisher, & Tucker as cited in Propp et al., 2003). The former foster youth described feelings of being unprepared, insecure, and unsure of how to make the transition from being tenuously connected to being independent. McMillen et al. (1997) stated that emancipated youth who failed to make the transition attributed their failure to a lack of preparedness. Several studies pointed to the need for an increase in practical skill application in both foster home and group home settings. The best means of preparing youth for life on their own and within communities is to ensure the opportunity for hands on experience and real world application of life skills, both tangible and intangible (Barth, 1990; Cook, 1994; Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001; Mech et al., 1994) (as cited in Greeson & Bowen, 2008). Tangible skills are defined as easily measured, concrete skills including education, vocation, job searching, locating housing, and consumer skills such as budgeting (English, Kouidou-Giles, &
Plocke, 1994). Intangible skills include less concrete and definable items such as decision-making, planning, communication, self-esteem, and social skills (English et al., 1994). For example, Children’s Receiving Home of Sacramento decided to expand their program to include 17- and 18-year-old emancipated youth, and provide hands-on, job ready skills on and off campus. The 18-year-olds will transition into shared apartments, and these individuals will still have access to medical care, transitional support, and more stable housing rather than entering a life of homelessness (Propp et al., 2003).

One study was based on the beliefs of three resilient African American adolescent mothers transitioning from foster care into independent living in the state of Illinois. The young mothers were followed for a period of seven months as they participated in a writing workshop for older foster youth. Project FYSH: Foster Youth Seen and Heard was established in 2004 by the Children and Family Research center at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Project FYSH is a writing workshop for older foster youth intended to elicit their experiences and perspectives. The goal was to build a greater understanding of life in foster care to inform child welfare research and policy. The seven FYSH writers were primarily African American (71%) and female 71%. All of the young mothers were African American. The young mothers attended sessions each week in which they addressed a variety of painful topics including sexual abuse, difficult experiences in foster care, biological parents drug use and mental illness, emotional ties to siblings, current feelings of hurt, desperation, loneliness, and anger, transitioning into independent living, and the experience of mothering while in foster care. The focus of
this study was to describe the beliefs of adolescent, African American mothers in foster care in order to raise relevant issues to child welfare research and practice. Like other foster youth, the three mothers in the study were entering adulthood without the benefit of a permanent or biological family to provide a safety net, and with many challenges including finances, the pressure of meeting multiple obligations, and stigma. They shared their viewpoints on the negativity of caseworkers, individuals with considerable control over them and their children, and challenged their status as “wards of the state.” Furthermore, the young mothers were vulnerable and did not have the best parent practices. Despite their vulnerabilities and challenges, these young women aged 19 and 20 had graduated from high school, and were employed part time, parenting their children, and transitioning into independent living (Haight, Finet, Bamba, & Helton, 2009).

Youth share both similarities and differences as they experience the transition from foster care. Geenen and Powers (2007) completed a qualitative study about the experiences of foster youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood, told from the perspective of the youth as well as foster parents and professionals. This study utilized 10 focus groups with a total of 88 participants. The findings focused on the themes of self-determination, collaboration, valuing relationships, importance of family, normalizing the foster care experience, the Independent Living Program, and issues centered on disabilities.
Current foster youth, foster parents, and professionals expressed their concerns about the foster care system. Foster youth and alumni expressed frustration about having very little hands-on application to practice skills or self-determination while in care. Some of the youth expressed that they need to see what is out there, so that they could make their own mistakes. In addition, the youth emphasized that their opinions should be taken into account when making important decisions that affect their lives rather than the caseworkers and foster parents disregarding their opinions.

Professionals expressed concern that the foster care system focused on safety and protection of children but did not address the need to help youth aging out of care prepare for independence. In addition, child welfare professionals agreed that youth should be given more opportunities to take ownership and responsibility regarding a successful transition. One caseworker stated, “when a teen has a choice and it makes them feel they are making the decision, they’re more likely to have success there” (Geenen & Powers, 2007).

Foster parents agreed with youth and caseworkers that young people in care need more opportunities to control and direct their own lives. “I feel so strongly that adolescents should be empowered a little more than we tend to let them,” stated one foster parent. On the other hand, the foster parents reported that they feel very restricted by foster care policies in terms of how much freedom they can let their foster children experience, as the foster parent is held accountable for any mistakes the young person
makes. Article: Tomorrow is another problem: The experience of youth in foster care during their transition into adulthood by Sarah Geenen and Laura Powers. 2007

**Identity**

According to Erikson (as cited in Corey, 2008) the development of identity is catalyzed by an overt crisis and is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society. Developmental crises particular to foster youth include the following: integration of experiences in birth and foster homes, development of a current self concept as a youth in foster care, consolidation of self-identity on a more mature level, and development of adaptive coping during young adulthood. Research explores the fact that the impact of foster care on identity has found that foster care had a negative impact on identity development (Kools, 1997; Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994; Yancey, 1992).

Studies suggest that both positive and negative experiences are associated with emancipation from state care as it relates to identity. On one hand, some graduates thrive in their newfound freedom after exiting the child welfare system. This may provide the “window of opportunity” suggested by one participant that provides a chance to more fully discover the self (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008). For example, the emancipated youth may now be able to explore other aspects of self without the influence of foster parents, caseworkers, etc. On the other hand, earlier research (Kools, 1997; Salahu-Din & Bollman, 1994; Yancey, 1992) shows that the foster care experience in its entirety often has a negative impact on identity development. The limited research (Newcomb, 1996)
that has specifically drawn connections between emancipation and identity development has outlined the negative impacts of pseudo-maturity, false identity, and stigmatized identity development. It is clear that a young adults experiencing sudden loss of protective relationships through emancipation may be more vulnerable to crisis (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008).

One qualitative study explored the experiences of 12 youth who were emancipated from state-sponsored foster care at age 18 and attempted to establish themselves independently. The findings were analyzed through the lens of two developmental theories: separation/individuation and relational/cultural. The interview data revealed that the often difficult experience of emancipating from foster care influenced an evolving sense of self. The participants identified strongly with self-sufficiency and help avoidance, and reported an inaccessibility of peer support (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008).

In addition, research shows gender differences in identity development and exposure to risk (Brown, 1992; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman 1991; Schultz 1991; Turner, Norman, & Zunz, 1997). Girls and boys have different developmental trajectories, different reproductive concerns, different vulnerability to violence and abuse, and different academic and career options (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993). As a result, different risk and protective factors which will be explored in the section on resiliency.
Aging Out of Foster Care

According to Administrative and Children Services (2003), 900,000 children leave the child welfare system in the United States because of child abuse and neglect. These children are removed from their homes so they can be protected from their caregivers. Government agencies placed these children into shelters and foster homes until families receive services to reunify with their children. The children who are unable to reunify with their families become the sole responsibility of the state, and the government is now considered the foster youth’s parent (CAI, 2007; Courtney & Heuring, 2005).

According to the Adoption History Project (2008), one of the first scientific investigations of emancipated foster children was published in 1924 and supported Out of Home Care and its child-saving function. Sophie Van Senden Thesis, who worked for the State Charities Aid Association of New York, attempted to answer the question, “How are former foster children functioning as adults?” The thesis study consisted of 910 former foster children for whom case histories were gathered from interviews and agency records to measure characteristics of the individual’s life before, during, and after their placement. These emancipated foster youth outcomes were based on how well the youth managed themselves and their affairs with ordinary prudence, and how many did not. Over three fourths of the population were deemed by Thesis as being capable (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996, p. 11).
Primary research indicates that most foster youth have difficulties transitioning out of care. In 2005, there were 513,000 children in foster care, and 97,470 of them were between 16 and 18 and awaiting emancipation (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003), approximately 20,000 youth leave the foster care system each year hoping to function as independent adults. Some of these youth who leave or emancipate from the foster care system have not been adequately trained in the life skills needed in order to live successfully as independent adults. Cook, McLean, and Ansell (1991) found that 2.5-4 years after leaving foster care, many discharged youth were living in economic standards similar to that of poverty.

It has been confirmed that a large proportion of youth exiting foster care experience negative outcomes such as unemployment, homelessness, and low levels of educational attainment (Licon, 1998). Often the risks experienced by these children depend on the type of foster care they experienced while in placement. Some youth have experienced multiple placements, or were placed indefinitely in long term foster care due to a shortage of foster care homes and social workers. In addition, the foster parent may not be any more successful than the natural family of these children in dealing with difficult behavior from children who are prone to acting out (Bolton, Laner, & Gai, 1981).

Many children entering foster care have medical, mental health, or developmental problems, as well as psychiatric disorders reflecting the neglect and abuse experienced
before placement, in addition to the trauma from being separated from their parents (Fraser, 1997). These same issues can continue to be present when the foster youth are emancipating out of the foster care system to adulthood.

Emancipated Foster Youth have disportionality higher rates of behavioral needs (Betz, 2010). 80% of these youth are diagnosed with emotional disorders in comparison to only 16% to 22% of the general population (William & Sheer, 2008). Foster youth’s health problems may contribute to risky behavior (Gramkowski, 2009). In addition, emancipated foster youth indicate clinically significant borderline behavioral issues of which 25% are internalizing and 28% are externalizing (Pecora, White, Jackson & Wiggins, 2009). Behaviors such as cheating, lying, stealing, and arguing were fairly common. Older foster youth have a greater tendency to engage in more risk taking behaviors; engaging in these negative behaviors may contribute to threats to achievement (Gramkowski, 2009). Despite these behaviors, some former foster youth have turned these negative behaviors around. It is clear from this writer’s perspective that everyone has the ability to change, but the individual must be ready for change.

Most of these children do not receive appropriate care while in placement. As the child gets older and leaves foster care their needs become greater, and many times go unfulfilled. They may live without the basic necessities of clothes and shoes, and eventually they may need to look for another way to survive as an adult. Sixty percent of foster youth girls have a child within four years of leaving foster care (Brown, 2002; Davis, & Barrett, 2000; Pediatrics, 2000). These children are most likely emotionally
neglected with attachment disorders such as being insecure and avoidant to their primary
care giver. The various types of attachment arising from early care experiences are
secure, anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant, and disorganized. They are not disorders
in a clinical view, but they are often discussed under the term “attachment disorder.” The
attachment disorder may persist and keep a child from developing a foundation of trust
and forming relationships throughout their life (Fraser, 1997).

Education has been associated with the American dream. Our society values
education, and has linked certain levels of education and job titles to the middle class.
For example, a professor on the collegiate level is considered to have middle to upper
middle class status. In today’s society, education is seen as a ticket to a good job,
economic independence, and career advancement (Casey, 2008). These dreams are no
different for foster youth. Unfortunately, According to a study conducted by Cook et al.
(1991) over 50% of the foster youth in their study did not graduate from high school.
Many studies show that adolescents that age out of foster care are poorly prepared for
employment and independent living.

Independent Living Programs

Employment

Employment after emancipating from foster care is essential to a youth’s
independence. Foster youth without any work history found applying for jobs difficult
because many employers require specific levels of job related skills and training. Many
foster youth found acquiring or maintaining skills while in foster care impossible. One
study conducted in Santa Clara County, CA, found that employment was the second priority to emancipated youth, housing being the first (Rashid, Doherty, & Austin, 2001).

In addition to better employment opportunities, youth need to learn how to retain employment after gaining a job. Cook et al. (1991) found that out of 34,600 participants only 38 percent had maintained a job for at least one year after emancipation. In a supporting study, which surveyed caseworkers, these workers described the highest level of deficits for foster youth were on the job skills and education (Leathers & Testa, 2006). The study found that the need for an improvement in job-related skills can be achieved with the use of job coaches. The focus of job coaches would be to match youth with adults that have experience in education and a career in the community. The coaches can help prepare youth for their journey into self sufficiency and independent living (Rashid et al., 2001). Job coaches could bring the youth to work with them, allowing the youth to explore different career paths and offer support to the youth when they face work place challenges.

**Housing in Sacramento County**

In Sacramento County, there are several resources for emancipating foster youth. Several nonprofit agencies work with youth on preparing them for transition during this delicate timeframe. However, once the youth turns 18, they are typically placed on a housing waiting list. There are three types of funding for transitional living programs, which are the Transitional Living and Community Support (TLCS) and the Transitional Housing Plus program (THHP) and the Job Corps.
Transitional Living and Community Support (TLCS) has a program that is focused on transitional age youth. Adolfo Volunteers of America (VOA) is a program for emancipated foster youth. A requirement for this program is youth need to have been in the foster care or juvenile justice system (Sacramento Resource Guide for Emancipated Youth, 2008). In addition, this guide suggests that the youth do not need a diagnosis with a mental health diagnosis in order to receive medical funding and services from Volunteers of America. However, the youth have to be homeless to fit the qualification for this program. Cook et al. (1991) reported that 25% of foster youth were homeless for at least one night. In addition, Barth (1990) noted that 30% of foster youth had no housing or were moving every week. This program assigns the youth a personal service coordinator who works with them on life goals in the community, such as stabilizing housing and enrolling in a vocational program. This program receives financial support from grants, donations, and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as well as support from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Transitional Housing Placement Plus program (THPP) is a fairly recent grant program through the State in Sacramento with specific focus on foster and probation youth aged 16-18 who are currently in the child welfare system (Children & Family Services, 2002). The requirement is that they have to be in a group home or foster placement on their 18th birthday in order to be eligible for services. The important factor is that these youth do not have to be defined as homeless in order to receive services. Barth (1990), Cook (1994), and Courtney (2001) state that the best setting for youth to
gain hands on life skills experience are transitional living programs which allow youth to practice living on their own with onsite support.

Lastly, Job Corps is another program in Sacramento County, which serves underprivileged youth. Youth do not have to be a former foster youth; however, some foster youth enroll in this program. Job Corps is a vocational and educational program that has housing on site. This program is intensive and offers GED preparation, vocational training such as Culinary Arts, Welding, and certifications (Sacramento Resource Guide for Emancipating Youth, 2008). At the Jobs Corps, students enroll to learn a trade, earn a high school diploma or GED and get help finding a job. In addition, the youth can receive a monthly allowance while in the program. To enroll in Job Corps, students must meet the following requirements: be between the ages of 16 and 24, be a U.S. citizen, meet income requirements, and be motivated to learn a trade.

**Independent Living Programs**

Transitional living is an extremely difficult time for adolescent youth who are exiting the foster care system. These youth are now faced with the sudden decisions of securing housing, maintaining daily life skills along with future planning such as vocational or higher education and socially functioning as a adult in society (Bell, 2002). As a result, several programs have been established to provide independent living skills and resources to assist these young adults to successfully transition to adulthood.

The United States Congress mandated the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, based on the growing need of homeless youth who described their failures in the foster
care system. This act allowed for the development of The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program also referred to as Independent Living Program. The Independent Living Program is found in the Title I of the Foster Care Independence Act (Children’s Bureau, 2001). Due to a large number of foster youth not being prepared for their independence, the Independent Living Program was established to target areas of concern in hopes to address or decrease the number of youth who are uneducated, homeless and unemployed.

The Independent Living Program is funded through the Federal Title IV-E funding. The federal budget allocates $4.9 billion per year to state child welfare departments through Title IV-E. They are funds that are allocated to a specific part of child welfare and can only be used for their specified purpose ( Adoption and Foster care Analysis Reporting System, 2005). “In California, 6 percent of Federal dollars can be spent flexibly to serve children and families” (Jim Casey Initiative, 2007, p.1). Each state is given the flexibility to choose what supports they will provide.

As the goal of independent living emerges, when emancipated foster youth realize that their birth families will not be consistent support for them, the goal is independent living (McMillen et al. as cited in Propp et al., 2003). Many of these youth describe feeling unprepared, insecure, and unsure of how to make the transition from being (at times, tenuously) connected to being independent. Many youth fail to successfully make the transition, which can, in part, be attributed to a lack of preparedness (McMillen et al. as cited in Propp et al., 2003). The approach to preparing young people in care to be self-
sufficient varies greatly among states (Cook et al., 1991; Mech et al. as cited in Georgiades, 2005a). The success of youth aging out of foster care requires careful scrutinizing of the very premise of independent living, the process of defining success, the method used to teach self-sufficiency, and the feasibility of societal expectations for these youth (Propp et al., 2003).

Determining and operationalizing outcomes for youth transitioning out of care is a difficult task. How is success defined and measured? Whose perception of success is important: the researcher, the community, the child welfare system, or youth making the transition (Propp et al., 2003)? According to most studies, the ultimate measure of success is sufficiency (Cook et al., 1991). Merriam-Webster (2002) defines self-sufficiency as “able to maintain oneself or itself without outside aid.” The question is whether this is an appropriate marker of success and the desired outcome for youth aging out of care. Despite the questions, research provides a group of outcome indicators that are used to measure the tangible success of youth who transition out of care (Propp et al., 2003).

Independent living programs provide a myriad of services including teaching youth a combination of tangible and intangible skills. Tangible skills are easily measured, concrete skills including education, vocation, job searching, locating housing, and consumer skills such as budgeting (Propp et al., 2003). Intangible skills include less concrete and definable items such as decision-making, planning, communication, self-esteem, and social skills (Propp et al., 2003). However, because tangible skills are easier
to define, teach, and measure, they seem to be the primary focus in most independent living programming. Intangible skill building is obviously more difficult to teach and often requires more experiential relationship-building opportunities (Wade, 1997).

Despite these negative statistics, some foster youth beat the odds by successfully transitioning from the child welfare system. As researchers were studying the negative outcomes of foster youth transitioning to adulthood, they discovered a small percentage of youth who were resilient in achieving their education and obtaining employment while continuing on a road to independence. These researchers were interested in asking the question: Why were these youth successful in the face of adversity?

**Resiliency**

In our society, many individuals show some sort of ability, talent, or strength. Despite these positive attributes, these same individuals may experience some form of crisis and find themselves stumbling or falling down from time to time due to a stressor. Yet, in the face of odds, many children and adults may possess the ability to rise above their circumstance, again. This phenomenon or ability as it relates to the focus of emancipated foster youth is known as resilience.

Resilience originally stems from the Latin *resiliens*, which referred to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2011), resilience is an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune. This term does not mean that one ignores the potential stress or pain, but the individual finds an inner strength or has the capacity to develop these coping skills to adjust to life’s complex
issues. In addition, the term “resilience” is reserved for unpredicted or markedly successful adaptations to negative life events, trauma, stress, and other forms of risk. If we can understand what helps some people function well in the context of high adversity, we may be able to incorporate this knowledge into new practice strategies (Fraser et al., 1999, p. 136).

The term resilience has been defined by researchers in a number of ways. Many researchers may be diverse and come from different educational backgrounds or different theoretical frameworks. Out of this difference, or many streams of thought, resilience has emerged with a great deal of definitions. Despite the ambiguities, theorists from several fields have contributed a great deal to the comprehension of resilience (Begun, 1993; Fraser et al., 1999; Grotberg, 1995; Masten, 1999; Miller & Macintosh, 1999). Grotberg (1995) pointed out that although resilience remains a familiar word in everyday language, there is not necessarily a consensus about its definition.

Although, definitions differ by degrees, there are some basic similar characteristics including adaptation, competence, determination, optimism and acceptance, etc. (Wagnild as cited in Wagnild & Young, 1993). The following are a few definitions of resilience, presented in publication dates 2000 and later. “Determination, previous experience of hardship, knowledge of available services, strong cultural and religious values, family supports, self-care activities, and care for others” (Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 13).
“Positive adaptation despite exposure to adversity which involves a developmental progression, with new vulnerabilities and new strengths emerging with new life experiences” (Masten & Garmezy; Werner & Smith as cited in Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, para. 10).

“Resilience refers to a person’s ability to adapt successfully to acute stress, trauma, or more chronic forms of adversity” (Rutter as cited in Feder, Nestler, & Charney, 2009, para. 1).

The researcher focuses on Fraser et al.’s (1999) definition of resilience as a broader construct in which resilience involves overcoming the odds, and being successful despite exposure to high risk and recovering from trauma by adjusting successfully to negative life events. In a similar mode, Masten (1999) refers to resilience as (1) people from high-risk groups who have had better than expected outcomes; (2) good adaptations despite stressful (common) experiences (when stressors are extreme, resilience refers to patterns of recovery); and (3) recovery from trauma. Regardless of the difference in the definitions, resilience must be acknowledged as a process and not a static or permanent trait of one’s personality (Fraser, 1997; Masten, 1999; Stewart, Reid, & Mangham, 1997).

However, some researchers have criticized the concept of resilience as focusing primarily on shortcomings. According to Rigsby (1994), the strong image of success gives the impression that every individual can get ahead, or there is equal opportunity in that everyone starts on the same playing field (absence of poverty), and that some disadvantages are just for the individual to overcome. Also, the concept of resilience may
be vague. For example, Gordon and Song (1984) claimed that the word may refer to a wide array of “behavioral adaptation, human circumstances, and human achievement that are colloquially included in what is referred as resilience” (Gordon & Song as cited in Wagnild & Young, 1993, p. 27).

Regardless, resilience appears to be based on a global concept with similar associations ranging from individual to multi systemic characteristics. For example, a person in poverty has a greater chance to abuse their children due to their life stressors whether in the United States or Thailand. Globally speaking, children under the age of five are more likely to be abused regardless of what country in which they reside. However, if given resources to encourage them on a pathway to self-sufficiency, the individuals would feel better about themselves and their families and, thus, strive for greater independence. Self-sufficiency is an important coping skill for emancipating foster youth so that, hopefully, they will not repeat the cycle of abuse if they have children. Furthermore, resilience is considered a fluid, dynamic, and not fully understood process that allows individuals, families, and communities who have experienced difficulties to go on with life (Dyer & McGuiness, 1996).

Some common features of resilience may be of Psychological/Internal Strengths, Spiritual Beliefs, Interpersonal/Social skills, and Social/External Supports (Wagnild as cited in Wagnild & Young, 1993). Studies have emerged highlighting many types of high-risk groups, especially children that show patterns of resilience. Garmezy (1973) was one of the first researchers to show findings on resilience. In addition, Werner (1982)
noted that among children who grew up in bad situations, their outcomes did not necessarily exhibit destructive behaviors. Masten (2004) was one of the first researchers to write about resilience patterns among emancipated foster youth.

Emancipated Foster youth who are resilient show evidence of vulnerability, usually in the form of emotional scars from a traumatic childhood in which they were placed at risk. This early trauma experienced by many former foster youth has a tendency to lead some of them to make problematic life choices when younger. However, many of these emancipated youth are highly resilient because they have survived devastating childhood experiences and somehow made different life outcomes for themselves that have afforded them a different life satisfaction. Resilience may be best conceptualized not as a finished product, but as a lifelong process (Higgins, 1994).

Resilience is present in the form of two conditions. Often, risk factors may show up in the form of stressful life events, and most likely will increase the vulnerability of individuals. Second, is the presence of personal, familial, and community protective factors that buffer against those vulnerabilities (Jessor, 1993; Kumpter, 1993; Masten et al., 1990; Rutter, 1987).

Experts are suggesting the strength-based model to understand the framework to protect youth. However, there is much debate about the definition of protection and how to put protective factors into practice (Fraser et al., 2004; Rossa, 2002). Most researchers agree that protective factors are attributes that lower the probability of an undesirable outcome (Benard, 2004; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). The disagreement area is
primarily focused on independence of protective factors in relationship to risk. The
debate has created some confusion when both risk and protective factors are
conceptualized as representing the opposite ends of a single continuum (Pollard,
Hawkins, & Arthur, 1999). Despite these concerns, some researchers agree with Fraser
and Terzain that protective factors operate in three ways.

Protective factors (1) reduce or buffer the impact of risk in a child’s life, (2)
interrupt a chain of risk factors that may be present in a young person’s life (e.g.,
disrupts a potential cycle of risks that may begin with peer rejection and lead to
involvement with antisocial peers and then to delinquency), and (3) prevent or
block the onset of a risk factor. (Fraser & Terzain, 2004, p. 8)

However, some emancipated foster youth have found themselves either on a
pathway of “moving on,” “surviving,” or becoming “victims.” As identified in
international literature, foster youth are considered among the most excluded young
people in society (Stein, 2006). These resilient individuals have discovered for
themselves a pathway determined by the quality of care they experience, or their
transition care, and the support they receive after care. Emancipated foster youth
presented with risks and protective factors are resilient individuals who have overcome
their odds and recovered from their past through strong coping skills.

Communities play a significant role in fostering resilience. Benard (1991)
identifies three characteristics of those types of communities: (1) availability of social
organizations that provide an array of resources to residents, (2) consistent expression of
social norms so community members understand what constitutes desirable behavior, (3), and opportunities for children and youth to participate in the life of the community as valued members. In addition, the collaborative efforts of community-school relationships are important for establishing additional resources to meet some of the basic needs of students and families.

**Social Supports**

Emancipated foster youth lose the formal support as they transitioned out of the foster care system. Transitioning out of care for foster youth is critical during this process as caseworkers try to assist them in developing informal support systems, which may or may not include their biological family. Courtney et al. (2004) indicated that youth transition out of care reported high levels of contact with their families of origin, especially with grandparents and siblings. Familial bonds may sustain these youth through their transition to adulthood. According to Hill (1999) kinship networks and extended family play a vital role and can act as an important source of support among African-Americans.

**Informal Supports**

Informal supports are just as important and may be found among the foster youth’s foster family, friendship relationships, and through mentor relationships. The term family is used broadly for former foster youth to include individuals in their lives with which they have a bond, however, not necessarily biological. Experts in community agencies have recognized the important role foster parents play in preparing youth for
independent living (Mech, 2003). Several studies of independent living youth reported
the youth learned life skills mainly from their foster parent (Courtney et al., 2002; Lemon
et al., 2005).

Furthermore, adolescents in care could benefit from the knowledge and
experiences of previously emancipated youth. Alumni in foster care could share their
personal experiences, if applicable, and offer suggestions as to how to improve the
transition to adulthood. Nixon and Garin-Jones (2000) found that young adults felt
strongly about the need to continue connections with other former foster youth. After
care could serve as a type of additional resource to encourage emancipated foster youth to
develop support groups and networks with each other. More efforts are needed to
improve upon aftercare support services for youth who leave care before the age of 21.
Some literature shared innovative ways to provide services and resources to young people
in transition including: resource/drop-in centers, Internet resources and access, telephone
assistance and information hotlines, and independent living refresher workshops (Nixon
& Garin-Jones, 2000). These short-term links or guidance may provide emancipated
foster youth a successful transition to adulthood.

**Mentoring**

Mentorship is another type of alternative formal support system that could benefit
emancipated foster youth (Barrera & Prelow, 2000; Mech, 2003). Some of the benefits
of a positive mentoring relationship are fostering self-esteem, developing coping skills,
positive outlook about their career choices (Barrera & Prelow, 2000). These factors are also important in fostering resilience (Luthar, 1999; Murray, 2003; Rutter, 1987).

Fostering resilience among emancipated foster youth requires family environments and communities that are caring and hold high expectations. In addition, it is important to encourage them to participate in the life of a family. Resilient emancipated foster youth have a greater tendency to establish a strong relationship with at least one adult, parent, friend, or significant other. Positive relationships help them stay focused on solid pathways for their future and diminish the family’s cycle of discord.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore resiliency among foster youth who emancipated out of the child welfare system. This chapter discusses the research methods used including study design, data gathering procedures such as sampling and instruments selected participants and data analysis. In addition, the protocol of the Protection of human subjects is outlined.

Research Questions

This study proposed three questions.

1. How resilient are foster youth who emancipate out of the child welfare system?

2. Is there a relationship between resiliency and social support for these foster youth?

3. Do former foster youth who participated in the Independent Living Program (ILP) demonstrate more resiliency than those who did not participate in ILP?

4. What are the differences in socio demographic characteristics and aging out experiences that are related to patterns of resiliency?
Hypotheses
Based on a review of the literature, the researcher posits the following hypotheses:
H1: There will be a small percentage of emancipated youth with average to high cognitive abilities of these youth will have a greater capacity to demonstrate resiliency. These tend to be not easily distracted and focus a great deal on education or on the job training or both.
H2: There is a significant relationship between resiliency and social support for former foster youths, that is, youth who demonstrate greater resilience have greater social support.
H3: Foster youth who attended an ILP will demonstrate greater resiliency and have greater social support than foster youth who did not attend an ILP.
H4: In respect to gender, depending upon geographic location is disproportionately, female. There exist a higher number of males specifically, African American males aging out of the child welfare system. The males have a greater tendency to make more money than females when employed. Based on societal changes, gender difference is on the rise in which there is an increase of transgender in the foster care system.

Study Design
Rubin (2007) stated that the purpose of an exploratory study is to provide familiarity to the topic. Furthermore, the purpose may be to examine a subject of study when it is relatively new. This is an exploratory study, which attempts to gain firsthand
knowledge of how resilient these former foster youth are in transitionally successfully out of care. Also, there is little data available which shows the relationship between foster youth’s resiliency and social support. This study is responsive to an area that has not been researched thoroughly. This researcher used an exploratory method via a quantitative design by examining the relationship between resiliency factors and a successful transition from the foster care system.

The study design used was a quantitative through the use a cross-sectional internet online survey using statistical analysis to analyze the data. The cross-sectional study is based on observations that represent a single point in time (Rubin, 2007). Cross-sectional studies may not allow for a definitive, conclusive inference, but it gives the opportunity to build upon our knowledge base on successful transitions for emancipated foster youth. The quantitative exploratory design was use for descriptive purposes. This will allow the researcher when analyzing the data to find out if the null hypothesis can be rejected. Quantitative methods used precise, objective, general findings (Rubin, 2007). This researcher made use of a quantitative methodology, to find out if there is a difference among emancipated foster youth who utilized the Independent Living Program. The research question that is being answered in this study is making an inference in which a conclusion is drawn based on our research design and or findings (Rubin, 2007).

Participants

The participants for this study included former foster youth who have emancipated from the foster care system and now are considered legal adults. Participants
were recruited from personal emails, and a social networking site. The personal emails contacts were developed through personal contacts from a variety of venues including Sac state classmates, youth facilitation workshops, and meeting business owners who shared that they were former foster youth. The researcher gave each participant the option to voluntarily complete the survey. Each participant was provided with a hyperlink to take the survey and forward it to friends. Former foster youth participated in this online survey that asked questions about how they emancipated from the foster care system successfully.

**Variables and Instruments**

The researcher designed a survey that included questions regarding participants’ socio-demographics such as age, gender, educational attainment, employment status and their current housing situation as well at two standardized instruments measuring resilience and social support.

The analysis for this study used independent and dependent variables. The dependent variables are resiliency and social support. The independent variables include a number of socio demographic variables as well as participation at an Independent Living Program (coded 1 = attended; 2 = did not attend).

The following discusses how each of the variables in the study was measured: Resilience. The Resilience Scale, published in 1993, was the first instrument designed to directly measure resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Wagnild and Young identified five essential characteristics of resilience. The five characteristics are self-reliance,
purposeful life, equanimity, perseverance and existential aloneness. These five characteristics are reflected in the 14 items on the Resilience Scale.

The Resilience Scale asks participants to indicate on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 with 1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Mildly Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Mildly Agree, 6= Agree, 7=Strongly Agree the extent to which they agree or disagree with the various statements. There are five questions related to self-reliance (2, 9, 13, 18, and 23) and three questions for personal meaning (6, 15, and 21). The last three characteristics were the focus of two questions each: equanimity (7, 16), perseverance (10, 14), and existential aloneness (8, 14). A total resilient score was calculated by adding the 14 items. The RS-14 has gained in popularity and had good reliability and validity. This scale was modified from the longer Resilience Scale, which originally was comprised of 50 questions.

**Social Support.** Social Support was measured using The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). According to these authors, sources of social support are family, friends, and significant others. This scale seeks to measure the perceived adequacy of social support from the three sources of family (FA), friends (FR), and significant others (SO).

The MSPSS has been widely used by many researchers who are looking for a clear, concise and accurate scale to measure support. The MSPSS uses a Likert-type scale (1= Very Strongly Agree, 2= Strongly Disagree, 3= Mildly Disagree, 4= Neutral, 5= Mildly Agree, 6= Strongly Agree, 7= Very Strongly Agree). A total social support
score was calculated by adding the eight items. The Multidimensional scale is an established scale with high consistent reliability and validity. Socio Demographic variables included gender, age, education, employment, housing and housing. 

*Independent living*. measured by asking participants to indicate if they participated in the program.

**Sampling Method**

Rubin (2008) states that a snowball sample is a non probability sample that is obtained by asking each person interviewed to suggest additional people for interviewing. The snowball sampling method was used for this study because this population can be hard to reach.

The majority of the participants were recruited through posting on the researcher’s face book site. The researcher’s social network is comprised of many social workers who work for both the county and area nonprofits who are in direct contact with former foster youth. In addition, the researcher knows several former foster youth through working in the social work field. There are a few individuals the writer has met within the past six months who were more than willing to do the survey to help the current foster youth in the system.

In addition, the researcher recruited from the Children’s Receiving Home’s new Independent Living Program that was working with males and females who were either 17 or 18 either and were living onsite or in apartments in collaboration with Pride Industries. Respondents were identified by the Independent Living Program social
worker, the ILP intake coordinator, or foremost the assistant director of the Children’s Receiving Home based on their age being at least 18 and the criteria of being a former foster youth who is primarily working or going to school.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data were collected through a questionnaire survey developed on Survey Monkey. The researcher included standardized questions for validity purposes. The questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete online. The participants were given the instructions how to complete the survey on Survey Monkey (see Appendix). Each participant had to agree to participate in the research by checking the appropriate box on the consent form, the first page of the survey. The researcher requested that participants contact her via email if special accommodations were needed. After receiving the questions from Survey Monkey, an online program that administers the survey, the researcher compiled the data and then analyzed it through statistical analysis.

**Human Subjects**

The researcher completed the application for the protection of human subjects after it had been reviewed by the thesis advisor. The application was reviewed and received final approval by the Human Subjects Review Committee of California State University, Sacramento in the spring semester of 2011. The Division of Social Work’s Human Subject Review Committee approved the application as “minimal risk.” The approval number is 10-11-07.
Confidentiality and informed consent was obtained through a consent form prior to conducting any data collection from Sacramento Children’s Receiving Home. The participants were told of the projects’ confidentiality and it was explained that through their social worker that the survey. The researcher was not present to answer any questions when the participants reviewed and signed the consent form, because the social worker at the agency and Intake Coordinator were on hand for the youth. The voluntary nature of the participation was stressed; since all participants are over the age of 18, parental consent was not needed.

The researcher found that many organizations were not willing to help unless the researcher had prior connections to those organizations. The researcher found that a growing number of organizations who help emancipated foster youth are on face book. The researcher found that it was useful to post on her face book website where many social workers are still connected to many former foster youth. The researcher requested that each social worker as well as family and friends forward the survey hyperlink to other former foster youth. Many former foster youth responded immediately. The researcher also collected email addresses of former foster youth within the past six months as she made contact with the public through a variety of functions such as educational fairs, community fairs and workshops.

The risk involved in filling out the survey was that it may cause some discomfort when answering questions related to the history of their placements or job information. The researcher provided a list of mental health providers on the consent form within the
county as well as an information line for participants outside of Sacramento County in case the former foster youth needed to talk with someone regarding past issues.

The researcher maintained the participants’ privacy by allowing them to take either an online survey through survey monkey or via a hard copy of the survey was sent to a participant if requested via email. The researcher did not have face-to-face contact with any of the participants. If any participant had a question was either answered through face book or email.

**Limitation of Study**

For the most part, all prospective respondents were from a limited geographical location consisting of Sacramento County. As a result, findings do not include different perspectives pertaining to resiliency factors of former foster youth transitioning out of the system from other areas. Thus, study findings have very limited generalizability.

Another limitation is that surveys were distributed online which prevented the researcher from monitoring respondents as they completed them. The researcher wanted to honor the respondents’ privacy. As a result, there is not a definitive approach ensuring that each respondent selected was the actual former foster youth completing the survey.

The survey is voluntary and the research could only include results from the foster youth who have chosen to participate. Thus, those who chose to participate may be systematically different from those who chose not to participate. In addition, the targeted population struggles with trust issues and as result can be hard to track down for
completion of surveys. Thus those who completed the survey may be higher functioning than those who did not.

**Statistical Analysis Plan**

The data were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were run on all the variables of interest including resiliency scales, multidimensional perceived social supports scale and if the independent living program was beneficial or not. Pearson R tests were calculated between all the variables to determine the level of correlation. The data collected from the research survey were organized into the groupings of quantitative questions. The quantitative questions were entered into the SPSS computer system.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings. Data analysis was conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results are presented in three sections. First, demographic information of participants is reported. Second, descriptive statistics in regard to the variables of interest such as resiliency and social support are reported. Third, findings regarding the research questions and result of hypothesis testing are reported.

Demographic Information

Data were collected from 33 participants who identified themselves as adult emancipated former foster youth. As presented in Table 1, the study participants identified themselves as 24.2% male, 60.6% female and 9.1% reported as transgender. In regard to the study participants, 48.5% of respondents identified themselves as African-Americans, 21.2% as White/Caucasian, 10% as Hispanics/Latinos, 9.1% as Native American and 3% as Asian. In addition, 1% identified themselves as other consisting of more than one race.

Ages of participants and their education attainment are also presented in Table 1. Their ages ranged from the age of 18 through 65, with a mean of 33.03 and a standard deviation of 16.5. Educational attainment were as the following: seven participants (21.2%) indicated having a high school diploma; seven participants (21.2%) indicated
that had obtained their GED; eight participants (24.2%) had some college; one participant
(3%) received an AA degree; eight participants (24.2%) completed their Master’s
degrees; and two (6.1%) reported other. Of the two who entered “other,” one participant
reported being close to receiving his/her AA degree and the other respondent is close to
receiving his/her Bachelor’s degree. In addition, the sample participants who were
employed consisted of 23 participants (69.7%) and 8 participants, (24.2%) were not
employed; however, they were attending school. There were 2 participants (6.1%) who
described their employment outlook as “other”; these participants were comprised of both
currently attending school and work.

In regard to housing, 16 participants (48.5%) lived in an apartment; one
participant (3%) reported living in an ILP program; one participant (3%) lived with a
friend; one participant (3%) lived in a shelter; three participants (9.1%) were considered
homeless, but living in a stabilized housing program through THP; 11 participants
(33.4%) reported “other”. Of the 11 who reported “other,” at least six of them were
homeowners. In addition, almost half the sample participants were in ILP (45.5%) and
the other half of the sample did not participate, (48.5%). Furthermore, there were two
who comprised of other (6.1%); these participants were either not aware of ILP or the
program was not available. Importantly, the participants who participated in ILP agreed
that the program was helpful.
Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Age                   | Mean=33.0 |
| range                 | SD = 16.5 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately, half the participants, (45.5%) were in ILP and the other half did not participate in ILP (48.5%). Regarding employment, 69.7% were working and 24.2% were not working and 6.1% were “other”. However, the ones who were not working were participating in school or volunteer work (see Table 2).
Table 2

Housing/Employment/ILP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of living spaces:</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ILP</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive Information on Participants’ Resiliency and Social Support Scores

Table 3 presents results of participants’ resiliency scores. Participants’ scores ranged from 54 to 98 with a mean of 88.9 and standard deviation of 12.2. Table 3 also presents the scoring of the Resilience Scale-14 and what percentage of participants fell under each category of resilience from very low to high resilience.

Twenty-seven percent of participants scored in the low to lower range of the RS-14 scale and 9.1% scored in the moderate range of the above scale (see Table 3). Three percent (n =x) scored in the range of 14-56 which is very low on the resilience scale; however, this does not mean these individuals have zero resilience. All participants have some degree of resilience. According to the manual, participants in this range may lack purposeful meaning in their lives, but they can strengthen their resilience and in doing so
may make a significant or positive change. Participants in the moderate range of 65-73 may attempt to solve problems and may feel that sometimes life is good. This group may feel unappreciative and their level of resilience could be strengthened. In addition, 9.1% of participants scored in the 82-90 range; their resilience level was moderately high. The moderately high group was in the middle, neither low nor high. These individuals are described as having many characteristics of resilience and have the ability to move forward and work through their problems. In addition, these individuals utilized a sense of humor to get through the day. Forty-eight percent (48.4%) of the participants (n = 16) scored in the high resilience range, which is 91-98. The resilience of individuals in this last range is very high which means they are doing extremely well in all levels of resilience and their lives have a purpose.

Table 3

Range and Mean on Resiliency and Social Support Scoring the Resilience Scale-14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Scoring Very low</th>
<th>Scoring Low</th>
<th>Scoring On the Low End</th>
<th>Scoring Moderate</th>
<th>Scoring Moderately High</th>
<th>Scoring High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RS-14 N=32</td>
<td>14-56</td>
<td>57-64</td>
<td>65-73</td>
<td>74-81</td>
<td>82-90</td>
<td>91-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency score of sample participants N=32</td>
<td>Range of Scores 54-98</td>
<td>Mean=88.9</td>
<td>SD=12.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On social support, participants’ scores ranged from 28 to 84 with a mean of 67.2 and a standard deviation of 18.9 (see Table 4). The mean reported in this sample is comparable to means reported in studies of minority youth who were not in the foster care system (Edward, 2004).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social support</th>
<th>Range Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N =32)</td>
<td>28-84</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Statistical Tests

As noted earlier, four research questions were posed in this study:

1. How resilient are emancipated former foster youth who exited the child welfare system?
2. Is there a relationship between resiliency and social support for former foster youth?
3. Do former foster youth who participated in the Independent Living Program demonstrate more resiliency than those who did not participate in ILP?
4. What socio demographic variable is associated with resiliency?

Question 1 was answered above. Over 62% (62.5%) scored in the moderately high to high range on resiliency. To answer the question 2, “Is there a relationship between resiliency and social support for former foster youth,” a bivariate correlation was
conducted. As presented in Table 5, results indicate a statistically significant positive association between social support and resiliency, with higher social support associated with higher resiliency ($r = .76; p < 0.01$).

Table 5

*Pearson Correlations between Total Social Support and Resiliency Scores (N= 32)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total social support</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.763**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

To answer the question 3, “Do former foster youth who participated in an Independent Living Program demonstrate more resiliency and greater social support than those who did not participate in ILP,” two $t$-tests were conducted with participation in the independent living program as the grouping variable (coded 1 = participated and 2 = did not participate) and both resiliency scores and social support as the dependent variables.

Results indicated no statistically significant difference in social support scores between those who participated in an independent living program and those who did not. As noted in Table 6, the mean social support for those who participated in an ILP program was 67.2, while those who did not participate in an ILP program had a mean score of 60.9. However, these scores were not statistically significantly different from each other.
With regard to resiliency, $t$-tests also indicated no statistically significant difference on resiliency scores between those who participated in an Independent living program and those who did not. However, results approached significance ($t = 1.85; p = .07$). As noted in Table 6, the mean resiliency scores for those who participated in an ILP program was 79.9, while those who did not participate in an ILP program had a mean score of 88.9.

Table 6

*Mean Scores on Social Support and Resiliency Scores by Attendance at an ILP Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ILP</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total social support</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67.26</td>
<td>18.91</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60.94</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency scores</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.93</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>79.81</td>
<td>14.92</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher’s hypothesis that former foster youth who participated in an ILP program would have significantly higher resilience and social support scores compared to those who did not participate in an ILP program was not supported. Noteworthy is that on both these scores, youth who attended an ILP had higher mean scores than those who did not attend an ILP; and on resiliency scores the difference between the two groups approached significance.

To answer the research questions, “What socio demographic variables are associated with higher resiliency, appropriate tests of association were performed?
Bivariate Pearson Correlations were conducted between the following: level of education, housing, employment and resilience as well as social support. None of the variables were found to be statistically significantly associated with resilience at the p<0.01 level of significance. However, the relationship between the level of education and resiliency approached significance (r=.323; p=.08) with higher educational level approaching significance with greater resiliency.

To determine whether there were significant racial/ethnic differences on resilience and social support scores, two t-tests were conducted with race/ethnicity as the grouping variable (coded 1= African American and 2= other) and resiliency and social support scores as the dependent variables. Results revealed no statistically significant racial/ethnic differences on resiliency scores; on social support the results approached significance (t=1.76; p=.09) with African Americans reporting higher social support compared to other race/ethnicities (see Table 7).
Table 7

*Mean Social Support and Resiliency Scores by Race/Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African Americans</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total social support</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>69.00</td>
<td>14.13</td>
<td>3.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>59.12</td>
<td>17.84</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency scores</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>86.73</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>82.41</td>
<td>14.02</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine whether there were significant gender differences on resilience and social support scores two t tests were conducted with gender as the grouping variable and resiliency and social support scores as the dependent variable (see Table 8). Results revealed statistically significant gender differences on resiliency scores, with males scoring significantly higher than females ($t=2.0; \ p<.05$).

Table 8

*Males and Females and Total Social Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resiliency score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total social support</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Findings

The literature indicates that African American males disproportionately exit the foster care system compared to other groups. In this study, African Americans were disproportionately represented with almost half identifying as African American. In addition, females participating in the study outnumbered males; also several transgendered individuals participated in the survey, a considerably higher than found in the general population.

Study finding revealed that emancipated foster youth who transitioned out of the foster care system have good resiliency with the majority of participants scoring in the moderately high to high levels of resilience. As hypothesized, social support and resiliency were significantly associated with each other with those having greater social support also having greater resiliency. The hypothesis that participation in an ILP program would be associated with greater resiliency and greater social support was not supported. However, youth who attended an ILP program had higher mean social support scores than those who did not attend an ILP; and on resiliency scores the difference between the two groups approached significance. Several socio demographic variables were of interest. Males had statistically significant higher resiliency scores compared to females and African Americans scored higher than other groups on resilience and on social support the mean differences approached significance. The next chapter discusses the implications, the study limitations, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction
This research study examined resiliency and social support among emancipated foster youth who transitioned out of the child welfare system. This chapter discusses research findings, presents implications for the field of social work, and offers recommendations for future research.

Discussion and Implications
The purpose of this study was to explore whether resiliency existed among emancipated foster youth exiting the child welfare system. The sample was an interesting one. Research indicates that African Americans are represented disproportionately in the child welfare system and that African Americans enter and exit the child welfare system at a disproportionately higher rate than their White counterparts (Briar-Lawson & Zlotnik, 2002). In this study, African Americans made up the largest number of participants who completed the survey (48.5%). The vast majority of the sample was also female (60%). Research indicates that there are more females who come into the child welfare systems than males; however, the aging out group has more males (George & Lee, 2002). Why females were so overrepresented in this study is difficult to determine. It is possible that females were simply more amenable to completing the survey. Also of interest was that 9% identified as transgender individuals. Researchers are presently investigating the social construction and multidimensionality of identity
development (Glover, Galliher, & Lamere, 2009). However, results have not included any adolescent samples. Because sexual identity is fluid, especially among the youth population, the researcher was sensitive in developing the questions on gender, although was not examining any findings on gender identity.

Since 2002, California has been the only state to support transgenders in the foster care system. The researcher, during her internship working with foster youth, has noted the presence of more foster youth expressing non-traditional gender and sexual identities. This will become an important area of research for future studies.

In this study, several hypotheses were proffered and tested. The hypothesis regarding resiliency is an important factor among emancipated foster youth and that many of these youth have high resiliency was supported. Specifically, the majority of the sample (67%) scored in the moderately high to high range on resiliency. The term resilience refers to the process by which an individual can bounce back from adversity. Resilience is not static; rather an individual’s level of growth changes over time. It is important for those choosing a career in social work to understand that at-risk youth in the foster care system have the ability to bounce back from their situation despite overwhelming circumstances. It is critical that those working with this population realize that with appropriate supports, these youth can and will eventually overcome their situation. Many of these youth desperately want and need the skills for succeeding.

The hypothesis that there would be a significant positive correlation between resiliency and social support was supported. Although it is possible that resilient youth
also have the skills needed to develop stronger social support, it is likely that children who have strong social support also learn the skills needed to develop resiliency. This has important implications for helping youth build resiliency and particularly important for foster youth. One way to help build social support for foster youth is to establish social supports systems before they emancipated out of care. Informal social support will become important even after foster youth pass the age of 18 and find resources through innovative programs such as the North Highlands drop in center referred to as a hot spot. Foster youth may need assistance in developing formal and informal social supports from familial bonds and from non-relatives such as previous foster parents. These individuals could represent a strong connection for permanency as they explore their options for independence. In addition, mentoring can be another type of formal support system that can benefit foster youth. Mentoring can help to foster self-esteem, as well as develop positive coping skills. These linkages could serve as important factors in building resilience as well.

The hypothesis that former foster youth who participated in an Independent Living Program would demonstrate more resiliency and greater social support than those who did not participate in ILP was not supported. However, those who participated in ILP had higher mean scores on social support and the difference between the two groups approached significance for resiliency. It is possible that with a larger sample size, this relationship would be significant. This finding highlights the importance of developing ILP programs for all youth. Some of the emancipated foster youth were not aware that an
Independent Living Program existed. It should not matter whether the participant is in a foster home, group home, or shelter. Independent living skills need to be presented to foster youth on all levels whether in a foster home or shelter. Many of the older participants in the survey indicated they developed their hands-on independent living skills with their foster families. As new programs develop, it is important to see how they can meet the needs of these young people in the areas of housing, education, and social supportive needs.

Not surprising was the significant relationship found between higher education and greater resiliency. This too has important implications for building resilience in youth and doing whatever is necessary to encourage foster youth to continue their education. Clearly, greater collaboration needs to occur between the educational and social service systems, especially regarding developing independent living skills.

A variety of options are needed for emancipated youth who are past the age of 18. AB12 sent a clear message that both the public and legislators, as well as social workers, are concerned that emancipated youth need support past 18 years of age. Just providing housing for youth past 18 in the form of homeless shelters sends a strong message to these young people that their goal in life is to remain in poverty. The goal needs to be to assist many others to join the rank of emancipated foster youth overcoming a life of poverty, drugs, and incarceration.

The finding that males had statistically significant higher scores than females on resiliency was surprising and is difficult to explain. This researcher has noted that in one
of the fairly new ILP programs, more males were in the program than females. It is possible than males were more likely to participate in ILP and therefore develop greater resiliency. More research is needed in this area.

Finally, it is also very important to redefine what constitutes success for emancipated youth. Some ideas of success are working with one emancipated youth at a time. Some successes may include:

- Obtaining a diploma or GED completed past 18 years of age
- Months of employment
- Number of youth leaving the system without welfare
- Completing a life skills training program
- Getting into college or joining the Armed Services
- Joining a positive peer group for the first time
- Distancing him/herself from abusive people
- Learning how to feel comfortable around members of another race or gender
- Not having a problem in an apartment situation for a long period of time
- Delaying gratification and working toward one planned goal
- Gaining any amount of work or volunteer experience
- Graduating from high school, community college, or a four-year university.

(Kroner, 1999, p. 119)

This project will hopefully heighten awareness that former foster youth can become resilient and generate ideas and programs to build greater resiliency. Every effort
should be made to increase awareness of this overlooked concept of resilience and the
social support networks among emancipated foster youth. Former foster youth can
achieve much if given the right support and consistent encouragement.
APPENDIX

Survey
How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

1. Informed Consent

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Janine Garrett, a Masters of Social Work student at California State University, Sacramento. This study will be used in partial fulfillment of the Masters in Social Work requirement at CSUS. This study will gather information from former foster care individuals and what resiliency factors contributed to them successfully exiting from the child welfare system.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study at any time without any consequences.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the resilience factors with former foster youth successfully transitioning from the child welfare system.

Risks: The risks associated with this study are minimal. If the questions asked in the survey cause feelings of discomfort or uneasiness, you may discontinue your participation at any time. If you feel that you have suffered any emotional or psychological harm as a direct result from this study, you may contact the following agencies:

1. CSUS Psychological Counseling Center 916-278-6011
2. Sacramento County Mental Health 916-776-7070
3. LaFamilia Counseling Center 916-456-2001
4. Outside the Sacramento area you can dial 211 and the operator can provide information in your area.

If you are experiencing an emergency or in immediate danger please call 911.

Benefits: You will not be given any compensation for participating in this study. You may not benefit personally from this survey. However, the information that you will provide will help social work practitioners better understand the relationship between resiliency factors and former foster youth.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made by the researcher to keep all the information collected confidential. Further, this researcher has enabled the program’s SSL encryption and masked the participant’s IP address from the researcher. No individual participants will be identified in reports or publications that may follow the study.

Identity: Your identity will not be known to this researcher, therefore, your answers will be anonymous. Your response will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used.

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher Janine Garrett at jsne_garrett2002@yahoo.com or (916)376-1713. In addition, you may contact her thesis advisor Mauri O’Keefe, Ph.D at California State University, Sacramento Mariposa Hall 5037 0000 J Street Sacramento, CA 95818 or by email: okeseffe@csus.edu or (916)278-7067.

Thank you for participating in the survey.

* 1. In completing this survey, you are agreeing to voluntarily participate in the research. The survey should take an estimated 10 or 15 minutes. Your identity will not be known to this researcher, therefore your answers will be anonymous. Your responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used.

- [ ] I agree to participate in this study.
- [ ] I do not agree to participate in this study.
How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

* 2. Are you 18 or older?
   - Yes
   - No

* 3. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Transgender
   - I prefer not to answer

* 4. What is your race/ethnicity?
   - African-American
   - Caucasian
   - Hispanic
   - Asian
   - Native American
   - Other (please specify below)

Other (please specify)
How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

* 5. What is your relationship status?
   - Married
   - Single
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - Domestic Partnership
   - Committed Relationship
   - Widowed
   - Other (please specify below)

   Other please specify: 

* 6. My age is: 

* 7. My highest level of education attained:
   - High school diploma
   - GED
   - Some college
   - AA degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctorate degree
   - Other (please specify below)

   Other (please specify): 

How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

8. If you have lived in more than one place, do you consider both locations to be home and part of your family?
- Yes
- No

Comment

9. Who do you consider as your primary family?
- Biological family
- Adopted family
- Foster family
- Friends
- Other (please specify)

Other please specify

2. Resilience Scale

This section will comprise of a 14 item resilience scale. The questions are very general to determine how resilient the individual is. Resilience refers to a person’s ability to bounce back from a difficult situation. Please read each statement and select the answer which best describes your feelings about the statement. Please respond to all statements.

1. Please rate each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I usually manage one way or another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually take things in stride.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Please rate each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am friends with myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I can handle many things at a time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am determined.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

**3. Please rate each of the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have self-discipline.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep interested in things.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4. Please rate each of the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can usually find something to laugh about.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My belief in myself gets me through hard times.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5. Please rate each of the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My life has meaning.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

**Instructions:** We are interested in how you feel about each statement. Read each statement carefully. Please select one circle to show how you feel about each statement. Please respond to all statements.

**1. Please rate each of the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Very Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a special person who is around when I am in need.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family really tries to help me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?**

### 2. Please rate each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>VSD</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>VSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends really try to help me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Please rate each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>VSD</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>VSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can count on my friends when things go wrong.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk about my problems with my family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Please rate each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>VSD</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>VSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family is willing to help me make decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can talk about my problems with my friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Please check all the boxes that apply to you.

Check yes or no to the following questions.

#### 1. I currently have a social security card?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No (please explain reason below)

Reason for not having a social security card
How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

* 2. I have or know how to obtain a checking or savings account?
   - Yes
   - No (please explain reason below)
   [Field for explanation]

* 3. I graduated from Independent Living Program (ILP).
   - Yes
   - No
   - Other (please specify)
   [Field for other specification]

* 4. I have a job.
   - Yes
   - No
   [Field for comment]

* 5. Check which applies to you?
   - I am currently homeless
   - I live in an apartment.
   - I live in an Independent Living Program.
   - I live at home with my biological family.
   - I live with a friend.
   - I live in a shelter.
   - Other (please specify below)
   [Field for other specification]

How Resilient Are Former Foster Youth?

6. I am hopeful about my future.
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

Comment

[Box to write comments]
REFERENCES


Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G. R., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T.


