Aging Out of Foster Care: Contributing Factors to the Challenges Faced by Youth

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Annotated Bibliography


The purpose of this study was to ask young adults aging out of the foster care system what challenges they have faced and what services they felt would be beneficial. Researchers conducted six focus groups with 72 youth in total and then analyzed this qualitative data by looking for themes across the interviews. After completing the interviews, researchers noticed three themes, which were youth focused practice, need for improved collaboration and communication with youth, and unmet needs and permanent connections (Connell-Carrick, Painter, & Scannapieco, 2008). Participants emphasized youth focused practice as a need because they expressed not feeling respected or involved in the decision making process. They emphasized collaboration and better communication because many youth felt uneducated about the services that were available to them and furthermore, the youth emphasized unmet needs and permanent connections because all participants believed that both tangible and intangible needs of the youth were being neglected. Participants also expressed a lack of learning opportunities to build new skills. The authors of this study believes that when caseworkers implement these three practices into their work, youth will be much more successful as they transition into adulthood.

This source is useful to me because it offers suggestions for next steps. My other sources define the problem and identify factors that influence the problem, but this article offers a way to make a change.


This study by Thomas Keller, Gretchen Cusick, and Mark Courtney categorizes four subpopulations of young adults who were preparing to age out of the foster care system. The purpose of this study was to determine how well young adults are prepared to transition out of foster care and into adulthood and furthermore, what factors impact their level of preparedness. Researchers in this study used a person-oriented analysis method to take into account all of the systems that affect youth in foster care. The sample consisted of 17 year olds who were currently in foster care at the time of the study and had been in foster care for a least one year prior to the study. The Sample came from Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa and the sample size was 732 participants. Participants were asked multiple survey questions about their past and present circumstances in regards to the following areas: employment, grade retention, parenthood, problem behavior, placement type, placement stability, and runaway history (pp, 459-460). They were able to form four classes of youth based on their answers to the survey and labeled the groups as follows: Distressed and disconnected, competent and connected, struggling but staying, and lastly hindered and homebound (pp. 470-475). The researchers predict the level of preparedness in each group and discuss the different challenges that each group is likely to face. I will use this source to explain how differences in foster care placement and experiences can greatly impact a person ability to be successful when transitioning into adulthood.


This article by Mark Courtney and Amy Dworksy attempts to bridge the knowledge gap between knowing that homelessness is a challenge faced by youth aging out of the foster system to understanding what factors contribute towards or protect from homelessness. For their analysis they used a longitudinal study of people aging out of the foster care system in three midwestern states. The sample consisted of 732 seventeen and eighteen year olds who were also interviewed again at age nineteen. Each young adult was asked questions about their experiences in foster care, their preparedness for independent living, and many other topics involving the challenges they face. Through their analysis they found that perceived closeness to a family member, behavioral tendencies during foster care, number of delinquent behaviors that a child has engaged in, and home placement all have a relationship with homelessness after aging out of the system. Through their analysis they also found that some of their hypothesis were not significant. For instance they did not find a relationship between closeness with a current caregiver and the likelihood of becoming homeless, nor did they find a relationship between measures of human capital like a high school diploma with homelessness. They also did not find relationships with perceived social support, substance use, or mental health. Many of the relationships they hypothesized did not prove to be accurate and therefore I think this article will help balance out my research by providing some differing evidence from the other studies I found to provide a holistic perspective in my own literature review.

Sarah Greene and Laurie Powers write this article from Portland State University. Their study collects qualitative data about the experiences youth face when transitioning out of foster care. They held focus groups with a wide range of participants, which included youth, foster parents, child welfare professionals, education professionals, ILP professionals, and other professionals. In total there were 88 participants and Researchers held ten focus groups with each different participant group having their own focus groups. Questions included the following:

1. What is it like for teens in foster care?; 2. How prepared are foster youth for transitioning into adulthood?; 3. How do foster youth prepare for adulthood?; 4. What formal transition planning happens for foster youth?; 5. In preparing foster youth for adulthood, what strategies are most helpful? What hasn't helped?; 6. Is there anything that's different for youth in foster care who are getting ready for adult life (vs. their peers in their general population)?; and 7. Are there other things (like one's cultural background, having a disability, being a girl or boy) that make it different for youth in foster care to get ready for adult life? (p. 1089)

In response to these seven questions, researchers found reoccurring themes in the following areas: Self-determination, collaboration, importance of relationships, importance of family, normalizing the foster care experience, the Independent Living Program, and subjects in regard to disability (p. 1089). In the result sections each of these themes is thoroughly explained. The focus groups emphasize a need for more services through the transition phase and the need to implement more innovative services while children are in the system. This article is different
from my other sources because it provides a qualitative perspective to the challenges foster children face as they transition to adulthood and this article offers suggestions on how to better the foster care system and the services provided during transition. I will use this source to help explain from multiple perspectives a broad realm of challenges that are faced by youth aging out of the system and I will use this article to emphasize the desire of youth and professionals for more transition related services.


The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of deviant peers on young adults aging out of foster care. They considered any seventeen year olds within eight Missouri counties eligible for this study. Researchers interviewed 406 young adults who were preparing to age out of the foster care system. Every interview was conducted at the home of the youth and alone with a professional interviewer. They asked questions regarding the following topics: demographic characteristics, employment, mental health, perceived stress, history in foster care, legal involvement, personality, family support, alcohol, smoking and substance use (Kolivoski, Litschge, Shook, Schelbe, & Vaughn, 2008). In this study researchers used a latent class analysis to identify different sub-groups of youth, which varied by individual characteristics, social process, and behavioral outcomes. Based off of their analysis, researchers concluded that deviant peers are correlated with negative outcomes in the lives of young adults. This article is
an important component to my project because it provides another perspective to a system that is affecting youth and their transition to adulthood.


http://search.proquest.com/socialsciences/docview/918336976/fulltextPDF/1411E811CB81098112C/1?accountid=15006

This study by Tonia Stott examines how placement instability while in foster care impacts the amount of risky behaviors young adults participate in once they age out of the system. Researchers sent out invitations to participate in their study to young adults who turned eighteen between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2008 while still in the foster care system. The final sample consisted of 114 eighteen year olds and each of these people were interviewed and asked both qualitative and quantitative questions. Participants were asked about their experiences with substance abuse and their sexual behaviors. Participant placement history from their time in foster care was retrieved from their case files. A linear regression analysis was used to see if there was a relationship between placement instability and risky behaviors. They found that the relationship between placement instability and substance abuse to be statistically significant, meaning that as the number of placements increases so does the rate of substance use. Their second hypothesis about sexual behaviors was not statistically significant, meaning they did not find a correlation between the number of placements and sexual behavior. Overall this study emphasizes the importance of reducing placements to limit future involvement in risky behaviors. This source is different from the rest because it explores the concept of placement instability and its role as a critical factor influencing the success of young adults leaving the
foster care system. I will use this study to explain the consequences of placement instability and how multiple placements can result in more challenges for the child in the future.