

What is the impact of permanency, or lack thereof, on youth?

Foster, Adoption, & Kinship Caregiver Preservice Training

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|--|----------|
| 1. Research Question | 3 |
| 2. Methodology | 3 |
| 2.1 Locating Evidence | 3 |
| 2.2 Article Assessment | 4 |
| 3. Scoping Findings | 5 |
| 3.1 Research Quality | 6 |
| 3.2 Study Findings | 8 |
| 4. Conclusions | 9 |
| 5. Bibliography | 9 |
| 5.1. Articles Retained After Full Review | 10 |
| 5.2. Articles Excluded After Full Review | |

1

Research Question

What is the impact of permanency, or lack thereof, on youth?

2

Methodology

2.1. Locating Evidence

A team of researchers conducted a search of the following resources:

- *EBSCOhost* library database- This database included the reference catalogues of *PsychINFO*, *Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection*, *Social Sciences Abstract*, *SocIndex*, and *Sociological Collection*
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
- Child Welfare Information Gateway

This review included materials that were published or developed after January of 2005 and prior to December of 2014 and were available in the English language.

Search terms (key words and phrases) were entered into EBSCOhost in the exact order presented below. Results in EBSCOhost were limited to peer reviewed journals and dissertations.

| Connector | Search Terms | Location |
|-----------|--|---------------|
| | (permanen* AND (options OR goal OR connection* OR home OR "family relationship*" OR "forever home" OR "planned living arrangement")) OR emancip* | Abstract |
| AND | "Foster Care" | Subject Terms |
| AND | Research OR study OR analysis | Abstract |
| NOT | Immigrant OR refugee | Title |
| NOT | Placements | Title |
| NOT | "Foster Parent" | Title |
| NOT | Father | Title |

2.2 Article Assessment

Researchers reviewed the titles produced from each source to determine if they answered the question and met the pre-determined inclusion criteria. Corresponding abstracts for all titles retained during the title review were reviewed to determine if the articles still seemed to answer the research question and meet the pre-determined inclusion criteria. Articles that remained were reviewed for the same purpose. Following this review, all articles that answered the research question and met the pre-determined inclusion criteria were subjected to quality assessment. The results of each review are outlined here.

| Source | Titles | Abstract | Full Review | Quality Assessment |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------|-------------|--------------------|
| EBSCOhost | 103 | 22 | 9 | 7 |
| NRCPFC | 12 | 12 | 1 | |
| Child Welfare Information Gateway | 5 | 5 | 1 | |
| | | | 11 | |

2

Methodology

Researchers recorded the following data on the Quality Assessment form:

- Study Citation
- Research Question or Hypothesis(es)
- Study Sampling Strategy
- Research Design
- Data Collection Methods
- Study Findings
- Study Limitations
- Sources of Bias

Researchers synthesized study findings and data on article quality. This synthesis is presented in the findings section.

3

Scoping Findings

3.1 Research Quality

The quality of the research included in this review varied. Research design is summarized in Table 1.

| Design | Quantity |
|--------------------|----------|
| Experimental | 0 |
| Quasi-Experimental | 2 |
| Observational | 3 |
| Qualitative | 2 |

Although this sample of research did not include any experimental research, in general several study characteristics contribute to one's ability to have some confidence in the study findings.

- Study sample sizes were quite large. Six of the studies used a sample that was greater than 500 subjects. Generally, a large sample size increases the strength of study results.

3 Scoping Findings

- Although most samples were not random, sample size does increase the likelihood that the study samples were representative of the population under examination.
- Research reports for several of the studies provided enough information that study methods could be replicated.

Some study characteristics limit one's ability to use these study findings with confidence.

- In several of the studies, authors did not transparently discuss or review study limitations.
- Given the research methods used, this is problematic as they all have inherent limitations that can challenge one's ability to determine if study findings were a result of permanency, or lack thereof.
- In some cases, authors present conclusions that are not supported by research findings.
- Several of the studies utilized data collection tools without established reliability and validity.
- Most of the studies relied on self-reported data. Although necessary, there are potential issues that arise when relying solely on this type of data.
- Most of the studies relied on data collected as part of the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth

Unfortunately, one of the greatest challenges present in this body of research is the lack of a comprehensive definition of permanency. In general, studies examined the impacts of foster care on youth emancipating from care, but not whether permanence was achieved.

3.2 Study Findings

The body of research related to permanency, or lack thereof, for former foster youth is limited. Much of the research in this sample examined challenges that former foster youth face, without examining if those challenges differ based upon a former foster youth's experience or perception of permanence.

3

Scoping Findings

Research examining the differences between former foster youth and non-former foster youth suggests:

- Former foster youth are less likely to achieve or to have aspirations to attain secondary education. (Courtney, Dworsky, Lee & Rapp, 2009; Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love & Vorhies, 2011; Courtney, Dworsky, Ruth, Keller Havlicek, & Bost, 2005; Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, Cusick, Havlicek, Perez, & Keller, 2007). In addition, when former foster youth attained secondary education, they were more likely to achieve stable employment (Samuels, 2008). These educational outcomes are likely impacted by the educational instability that many foster youth experience due to placement moves and social and emotional challenges as a result of their abuse histories (Pecora, 2012).
- Former foster youth are less likely to attain stable employment status, or attain employment with a competitive wage (Courtney, et al., 2009; Courtney, et al., 2011; Courtney, et al., 2005; Courtney, et al., 2007; Samuels, 2008).
- Former foster youth are more likely to struggle with maintaining stable housing (Courtney, et al., 2009)
- Former foster youth are more likely to face economic hardship, or need public assistance with income, food and medical care (Courtney, et al., 2009; Courtney, et al., 2011; Courtney, et al., 2005; Courtney, et al., 2007).
- Former foster youth are more likely to have some experience with the Criminal Justice System (Courtney, et al., 2009; Courtney, et al., 2011; Courtney, et al., 2005; Courtney, et al., 2007).
- Former foster youth are more likely to become single parents (Courtney et al., 2011).
- Former foster youth often identify that they are lacking emotional support (Samuels, 2008).
- In general, the challenges faced by former foster youth were even greater for those former foster youth who identified themselves as Black (Naccarato, Brophy & Courtney, 2009).

3

Scoping Findings

Research examining the challenges former foster youth experience suggests former foster youth:

- Often lack preparedness to succeed as an adult (Courtney, et al., 2009).
- Often lack “connectedness”(Courtney, et al., 2009). Many of these youth hope for permanence, but are not confident they will attain permanency, because it is often perceived as being out of their control (Samuels, 2008). Further, foster youth often only identify relationships as supportive if they have known the person two years or more. This suggests that duration is important in developing supportive relationships.
- Report a lack of well-being (Courtney, et al., 2009).

4. Conclusions

Although this research has some limitations, it clearly indicates that former foster care youth do not fare as well as youth who had never been in foster care when compared on educational outcomes, employment attainment, housing stability, economic status, and criminal justice involvement. Youth making the transition to adulthood from foster care are faring worse than their same-age peers, in many cases much worse, across a number of domains of functioning. They approach the age of majority with significant educational deficits and relatively few of them appear to be on a path that will provide them with the skills necessary to thrive in today's economy. They are less likely to be employed than their peers, and earnings from employment provide few of them with the means to make ends meet. This is reflected in the economic hardships many of them face and the need that many of them have for government assistance. A large number continue to struggle with health and mental health problems and these youth are much more likely than their peers to find themselves involved with the criminal justice system.

It is also evident that in situations where researchers examined relational connections, those youth who have strong family ties or long-term (more than 2 years) supportive people in their lives are more likely to seek secondary education and gain and maintain stable employment and living situations. Thus, attaining relational permanence may impact their ability to be successful.

Much of this research is based on the assumption that youth who age out of foster care do not achieve permanency. Because of this assumption, very little of the research addressed the question of this scoping review--namely, "What is the impact of permanency, or the lack thereof, on the well-being of a child?" Few researchers pose this question, nor identify permanence or the lack of permanence as a potential contributing factor to their findings--but rather suggest that other factors (i.e., the lack or presence of adequate independent living preparation) contribute to the differences between former foster youth and non-foster youth.

This research suggests that the child welfare system is lacking effective programming and permanent living situations to support foster youth aging out of care. Further research is necessary to extend upon the current research in order to purposefully explore the specific role that

5.1. Articles Retained After Full Review

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., Cusick, G. R., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: outcomes at age 21. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Lee, J., & Raap, M. (2009). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: outcomes at age 23 and 24. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Ruth, G., Keller, T., Havlicek, J., & Bost, N. (2005). Midwest evaluation of adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 19. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago Working Paper (May 2005), 1-77.

Naccarato, T., Brophy, M., & Courtney, M. (2009). Employment Outcomes of Foster Youth: The results from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Foster Youth. *Children and Youth Services Review* 32 (2010), 551-559.

Pecora, P. (2012). Maximizing educational achievement of youth in foster care and alumni: Factors associated with success. *Children and Youth Services Review* (34), 1121-1129.

Samuels, G.M. (2008) A Reason, a Season, or a Lifetime: Relational Permanence Among Young Adults with Foster Care Backgrounds. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

5.2. Articles Excluded After Full Review

- Keller, T.E., Cusick, G.R., & Courtney, M.E. (2007). Approaching the transition to adulthood: Distinctive profiles to adolescents aging out of the child welfare system. *Social Services Review*, 453-484.
- Scannapieco, M., Connell-Carrick, K., & Painter, K. (2007). In their own words: Challenges facing youth aging out of foster care. *Child & Adolescent Social Work*, 24, 423-435.
- Kruszka, B.J., Lindell, D., Killion, C., & Criss, S. (2012). "It's like pay or don't have it and now I'm doing without": The voice of transitional uninsured former foster youth. *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice*, 13(1), 27-37.
- Fruendlich, M., Avery, R.J., Gertenzang, S., & Munson, S. (2006). Permanency options and goals: considering multifaceted definitons. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 35, 355-374.