

**Promoting Well-being among
Youth Aging Out of Foster Care with Disabilities:
*Using Data to Inform Practice***

Leah P. Cheatham, PhD, JD, MSW

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA | School of
Social Work

Understanding the Problem

3.3 MILLION REPORTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN → RESULTING IN 251,764 PLACED IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

WE PROMISED A BETTER LIFE: SAFETY FAMILY HOME
INSTEAD 23,439 Aged OUT OF FOSTER CARE

- 1 in 5 WILL BECOME HOMELESS AFTER AGE 18
- ONLY 1/2 WILL BE EMPLOYED AT AGE 24
- <3% WILL EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE
- 71% OF YOUNG WOMEN WILL BE PREGNANT BY AGE 21
- 1 in 4 WILL EXPERIENCE PTSD

Source: www.youth.org/about/aging-out

Understanding the Problem

Foster care students and higher education

Each year 20,000 youth age 16 and older transition or "age out" of foster care

More than 500,000 children and youth are in foster care in the United States

7-13% Percentage of students from foster care who enroll in higher education

Only about 2 percent of young people from foster care obtained bachelors degrees, in contrast to 24 percent of adults in the general adult population

2% 24%

SOURCE: Casey Family Programs | EVERETT NEWS GRAPHIC

Well-being?

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children’s needs
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their physical and mental health needs

What we know youth need...

- Lasting connections with caring adults;
- Stable academic environment;
- Limited placement changes;
- Access to health care;
- Better identification and treatment of mental health issues;
- Expanded service and support options, suited to specific needs.

Pecora, et al. (2005) *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings From The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

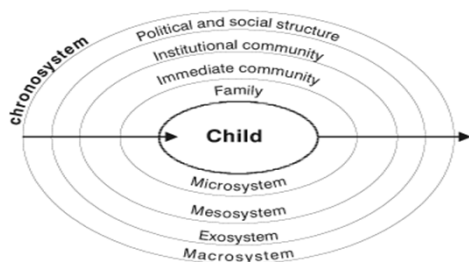
Understanding the Problem

Youth aging out (YAO) YAO w/ disabilities Youth transitioning w/ disabilities

Research Aims

- (1) Present a demographic portrait of youth in care with disabilities at age 19;
- (2) Describe educational and employment outcomes of youth aging out with disabilities at age 19; and
- (3) Identify differences between youth aging out with disabilities (by status and type) relative to those without disabilities across key descriptors and outcomes.

Theoretical Overview: Ecological Perspective



Applying an Ecological Lens

- Chronosystem**
 - Developmental perspective: *Identity formation*
- Macrosystem**
 - Federal policy initiatives: *IDEA, ILP, FCIA, Fostering Connections Act*
 - State-by-state differences in Independent Living Programs
- Exosystem**
 - Transition planning coordination
- Mesosystem**
 - Attachment Theory
- Microsystem**
 - Self-determination
 - Individual differences: *Race; gender; disability*

Data Sources

National Youth in Transition Data (NYTD)

- National, non-probabilistic sample of youth in foster care
- Survey administered to youth at age 17 and 19 (2011 & 2013)
- 2011 (Wave 1) – Personal and care information (including Chafee-funded IL services)
- 2013 (Wave 2) – Education & Employment

Adoption & Foster Care Analysis & Reporting System (AFCARS)

- National service data of youth in foster care
- Provides case-level information about youth's circumstances while in care
- 2011 – Disability status (yes = 2915; 45%) and type:
 - physical (n=110) →Emotional Dx ONLY (n=1436; 49%)
 - sensory (n=249) →Emotional Dx PLUS other (n=875; 30%)
 - mental (n=209) →Non-emotional Dx (n=604; 21%)
 - emotional (n=2024)
 - other (n=1073)

Findings: Diagnosis vs. No Diagnosis

- ↑ Males
- ↑ Caucasians
- ↑ Special Education
- ↑ More Removals
- ↑ SSI/SSDI
- ↑ Health Insurance
- ↑ Foster Care 18+
- ↑ IL Services
- ↑ IL Needs Assessments

Findings: Diagnosis vs. No Diagnosis

| Individual-level Characteristics | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| | | No Dx (N = 3,585) | Dx (N = 2,915) | Total (N = 6,500) |
| Sex*** | Male | 43.3 | 49.4 | 46.1 |
| | Female | 56.7 | 50.6 | 53.9 |
| Race*** | White | 42.4 | 46.2 | 44.1 |
| | Black | 32.4 | 27.4 | 30.2 |
| | Hispanic | 17.3 | 17.4 | 17.4 |
| | Other | 7.9 | 9.0 | 8.4 |
| Age | (months) | 229.5 | 229.6 | 229.5 |

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Findings: Diagnosis vs. No Diagnosis

| System- & Service-level Characteristics | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|------|-------|
| | | No Dx | Dx | Total |
| Special Education*** | (Yes) | 18.2 | 36.5 | 26.4 |
| | (NR) | 15.8 | 7.3 | 13.5 |
| Total # of Removals*** | 1 | 70.0 | 64.1 | 67.4 |
| | 2 | 21.3 | 24.4 | 22.7 |
| | 3+ | 8.7 | 11.6 | 10.0 |
| SSI/SSDI*** | (Yes) | 10.5 | 19.4 | 14.5 |
| Health Insurance*** | (Yes) | 78.4 | 82.5 | 80.2 |
| Foster Care (at age 19)*** | (Yes) | 26.9 | 37.8 | 31.8 |
| Received ANY service*** | (Yes) | 61.7 | 67.0 | 64.1 |
| IL needs assessment*** | (Yes) | 36.9 | 47.3 | 41.6 |

Findings: Diagnosis vs. No Diagnosis

↔ High School Graduation

↓ Post-secondary Enrollment

Findings: Diagnosis vs. No Diagnosis

| Education and Employment Outcomes | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| | | No Dx | Dx | Total |
| Educational Attainment | | | | |
| | Graduated HS or GED | 66.8 | 66.6 | 66.7 |
| Post-secondary Education** | | | | |
| | Enrolled - any intensity | 30.1 | 25.8 | 28.1 |
| Employment | | | | |
| | Full-time | 24.7 | 22.6 | 23.8 |
| | Part-time | 12.3 | 10.7 | 11.6 |
| Incarceration ~ | | 22.5 | 19.9 | 21.1 |
| Homelessness | | 21.1 | 19.7 | 20.3 |

Findings: Diagnosis Type

Disability status (yes = 2915; 45%) and type:

- physical (n=110)
- sensory (n=249) →Emotional Dx ONLY (n=1436; 49%)
- mental (n=209) →Emotional Dx PLUS other (n=875; 30%)
- emotional (n=2024) →Non-emotional Dx (n=604; 21%)
- other (n=1073)

Findings: Diagnosis Type

| Emotional-Only Dx | Emotional PLUS Other Dx | Non-Emotional Dx |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| ↑ Males | ↑ Special Education | ↑ More Removals |
| ↑ Caucasians | ↑ More Removals | ↑ Health Insurance |
| | ↑ SSI/SSDI | ↑ Foster Care 18+ |
| | ↑ Health Insurance | ↑ IL Services |
| | ↑ Foster Care 18+ | |
| | ↑ IL Needs Assessment | |

Findings: Diagnosis Type

| Individual-level Characteristics | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| | No Dx (N=3,585) | Emo Dx (N=1,436) | Emo+ Dx (N=875) | Non-Emo Dx (N=604) | Total (N=6,500) |
| Sex*** | | | | | |
| Male | 43.3 | 49.7 | 53.6 | 42.7 | 46.1 |
| Female | 56.7 | 50.3 | 46.4 | 57.3 | 53.9 |
| Race*** | | | | | |
| White | 42.4 | 50.3 | 48.5 | 33.1 | 44.1 |
| Black | 32.4 | 27.6 | 25.6 | 29.5 | 30.2 |
| Hispanic | 17.3 | 12.7 | 17.0 | 29.3 | 17.4 |
| Other | 7.9 | 9.4 | 8.9 | 8.1 | 8.4 |
| Age | | | | | |
| (months) | 229.5 | 229.6 | 229.6 | 229.6 | 229.5 |

Discussion & Conclusions

Disability Status

- ❖ Findings of disability prevalence among youth aging out → Slayter, 2016
- ❖ Importance of operationalization of disability within studies of youth aging out (i.e., special education receipt ≠ disability, or vice versa).

Disability Type

- ❖ Findings of disadvantage among youth with emotional diagnoses across multiple measures → NLTS2; Mares & Kroner, 2011; Leathers & Testa, 2006

Educational Attainment and Post-secondary Enrollment

- ❖ HS completion: youth aging out (67%) compared to general population youth (80%) (NLTS2)
- ❖ PS participation: youth aging out (26%) compared to general population youth (31%) (NLTS2)
- ❖ Educational success of youth with non-emotional diagnoses.
- ❖ Importance of further understanding educational barriers for youth with emotional diagnoses.

Limitations

- ❖ Non-random sample (i.e., non-response bias)
- ❖ Data collection modalities
- ❖ Data quality
- ❖ Censoring

Recommendations

- ❖ Increase frequency and consistency of administration of IL needs assessments (?)
- ❖ Attention toward the disability-related training of both child welfare and IL workforces.
- ❖ Need for protocol to integrate transitions plans across child welfare and special education systems to meet the consistent goals of Chaffee (1999) Fostering Connections Act (2008) and IDEA (2004).
- ❖ Need for educational surrogates to serve as consistent advocates for youths' educational goals.

Recommendations

- ❖ Increase frequency and consistency of administration of IL needs assessments (?)



Recommendations

- ❖ Attention toward the disability-related training of both child welfare and IL workforces.



Recommendations

- ❖ Need for protocol to integrate transitions plans across child welfare and special education systems to meet the consistent goals of Chaffee (1999) Fostering Connections Act (2008) and IDEA (2004).

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children & Families

**John H. Chafee Foster Care
Independence Program**



IDEA
Individuals with
Disabilities Act

**FOSTERING CONNECTIONS
TO SUCCESS AND INCREASING
ADOPTIONS ACT OF 2008**

Questions?

(Thank you!)

Special thanks to
The Doris Duke Foundation, &
The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect

Dr. Leah P. Cheatham
lpcheatham@ua.edu

Findings: Demographics

| Individual-level Characteristics of Youth with Disabilities | | |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| | <i>N = 2,915</i> | <u>Total %</u> |
| Sex | | |
| | <i>Male</i> | 49.4 |
| | <i>Female</i> | 50.6 |
| Race | | |
| | <i>White</i> | 46.2 |
| | <i>Black</i> | 27.4 |
| | <i>Hispanic</i> | 17.4 |
| | <i>Other</i> | 9.0 |
| Age | | |
| | <i>(months)</i> | 229.6 |

Findings: Demographics

| System- & Service-level Characteristics of Youth with Disabilities | | |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| | | <u>Total %</u> |
| Special Education | <i>(Yes)</i> | 36.5 |
| | <i>(NR)</i> | 7.3 |
| Total # of Removals | <i>1</i> | 64.1 |
| | <i>2</i> | 24.4 |
| | <i>3+</i> | 11.6 |
| SSI/SSDI | <i>(Yes)</i> | 19.4 |
| Health Insurance | <i>(Yes)</i> | 82.5 |
| Foster Care (at age 19) | <i>(Yes)</i> | 37.8 |
| | | |
| Received ANY service | <i>(Yes)</i> | 67.0 |
| IL needs assessment | <i>(Yes)</i> | 47.3 |

Findings: Demographics

| Education and Employment Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities | |
|--|-------------|
| | Total % |
| Educational Attainment | |
| <i>Graduated HS or GED</i> | 66.6 |
| Post-secondary Education | |
| <i>Enrolled – any intensity</i> | 25.8 |
| Employment | |
| <i>Full-time</i> | 22.6 |
| <i>Part-time</i> | 10.7 |
| Productive Engagement | |
| <i>Working or PS Ed.</i> | 47.5 |
