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## Help-Seeking Behaviors and Employment Hope Among Depressed Black Male Foster Care Alumni

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Help-Seeking Behaviors and Employment Hope Among Depressed Black Male Foster

Care Alumni

by

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MSW, University of South Carolina, 2013

BS, Voorhees College, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

Walden University

March 2023

## Abstract

Traumatic depression is a system of experiences where the mind, heart, and gut track happenings lingering among systemic models of prevention and intervention and personal stories. This nonexperimental correlational study aimed to provide insights into mental help-seeking and employment hope among depressed Black/African American foster care male alums. The central research question was to what degree, if any, a positive relationship exists between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among male foster care alums who identify with depression. It was hypothesized that a statistically significant relationship exists. The social cognitive career theory and theory of planned behavior were used as evidence-based strategic models to help promote understanding of economic reasoning and employability among this vulnerable population. Primary data were collected through online social media platforms by survey with 177 U.S. research respondents, exceeding the needed sample size ( $N = 128$ ). Convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were used. Data findings were exported from Qualtrics to SPSS (Version 28) to run a nonparametric test, Spearman Rho, as an analytic strategy for a bivariate analysis to help produce the findings. The measuring instruments included Mental Help Intention Seeking, the Short Employment Hope, and the Depression Sensitivity Index. The results indicated a nonmonotonic relationship between mental help-seeking and employment hope among the studied population. Although there was no significance in the findings, human services professionals can use the results to identify other barriers directly relevant to the foster alums' community to promote assessing societal impacts experienced aftercare.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation as a timeless manual of tools to equip families in rural, suburban, and urban communities to triumph over their adverse circumstances. A special reference to men and young boys to walk proudly in their vulnerability with their heads held high and to esteem themselves more elevated than any public or self-stigma. A heartfelt thanks to my parents, Edna Singletary-Jennings and Eddie Jennings, siblings, relatives, friends, life coach, and therapist for their empowering words.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Even the strongest systems do not compare to the concerns that come with adapting to new environments, reconnecting with family, figuring out how to make a living, and mental health. The foster care system has long-term effects on communication, emotional wellbeing, and accessibility to resources for stability after aging out of foster care (Brännström et al., 2020). Unmet needs prior to entering and exiting the foster care system are likely revealed in adulthood through resurfacing memories of childhood trauma (Hernandez & Lee, 2020). The memories of childhood trauma and its invisible impression possibly result in varying mental illnesses, conditions, and/or concerns (Brännström et al., 2020; Hernandez & Lee, 2020). However, in the dawn of the 2020s, the pervasiveness of childhood trauma has grown in the United States and still lingers into adulthood and after exiting foster care, where it makes daily life routines challenging.

The joint pressures (e.g., peer, academic, socioeconomic) of everyday life in the Black foster care alumni community increase the risk of depression and the likelihood of unemployment (Plowden et al., 2016). Identifying as a Black male may be linked to factors such as mistrust, stigma, and masculine norms that influence their help-seeking behavioral patterns (Villagrana et al., 2018). Some governmental entities and organizations have used psychological transformation interventions in incremental stages to ease successful transitions for short- and long-term well-being after emancipation from foster care (Stoltzfus, 2017). However, research among older Black male foster care alumni about challenges and reporting mental help-seeking and employment hope are

limited (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2018; Hambrick et al., 2016; Marriot, 2018; Szilagy, 2018). Efficient research strategies are needed to negotiate a shared understanding of mental health treatment needs and address systemic barriers to seeking mental help and having employment hope after exiting foster care.

This chapter is organized into essential elements that explain the phenomenon of mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni. This chapter includes the problem, purpose, and research question. Other elements provided in the study include the background, significance, research question, hypotheses, definitions, assumptions, limitations, and scope and delimitations. In outline, this chapter leads to the development of the elements of the key variables of the study discussed in the remaining chapters.

### **Background of the Study**

Emotional trauma is an increasing issue within employment. The onset of the 2020 pandemic pathologies revealed undiscovered internal triggers of emotions concerning adverse outcomes affecting employment across different occupations (Gemelas et al., 2021). Although the experience of being quarantined during this ongoing COVID-19 caused these actions to happen, it has generated many business successes, more quality time with family and friends, and self-reflections (Boden et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). However, a few external triggers of situations that bring back reflections of traumatic circumstances include health-related disparities in finances, housing, insurance cost, mental health conditions, experiences, and illnesses that may cause emotional trauma (Gemelas et al., 2021). The complexity of striving for economic success and

achieving a balance between employment hope and mental help-seeking may affect psychological self-sufficiency and the successful transition of low-skilled workers to develop employment hope. According to Rosenberg and Kim (2018), employment hope means achieving economic success for low-skilled individuals as a psychological motivator when confronted with situational circumstances involving job searching, employability, financial difficulties, and retention. Plowden et al. (2016) and Häggman-Laitila et al. (2018) found some of the manifestations of both understanding and conceptualizing psychological human behavior, which include but are not limited to depression, reluctance, disproportionate obstacles, fear, and self-doubt. These behavioral patterns may occur in a work environment. Therefore, a foster care alum from a different cultural/ethnic background suffering from depression in a rural setting, seeking mental help and employment can negate motivation and total well-being (Villagrana, 2017).

More research is needed in employment hope and the Black/African American community. Existing literature that has addressed employment hope and mental help-seeking behaviors of male Black/African Americans foster care alumni suffering from depression is limited (Gough & Novikovia, 2020; Stiawa et al., 2020; Villagrana, 2017). Villagrana et al. (2018) found that that majority of foster care alumni avoided use of mental help and that their perception of self-stigma for the use of mental health services formed while in foster care and continued after care. Youth with mental health issues are twice as likely to receive services from the child and adolescent mental health services and primary health care than youth without such issues (Larsen et al., 2018). Häggman-Laitila et al. (2018) found that care leavers had different views of their transition to adult



life. The views varied significantly based on their varying experiences about capabilities, emotions, and identity. These findings supported evaluating the association involving mental help-seeking and employment hope among Black male foster care alumni with depression. Research findings from this Spearman correlational study may help behavioral health and career development professionals in forensic mental health organizations. The research findings may help their ability to make referrals to trauma-specific services and become increasingly trauma-informed after taking part in a trauma-informed care intervention (Damian et al., 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

Over 400,000 youth live in foster care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2019). Over 90% of foster youth experience several types of traumatic mental health issues resulting in diverse types of abuse: 13% physical, 4% sexual, 63% neglect, 7% parental incarceration, 5% abandonment, and death of a parent at 1% (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2019). Children in foster care are increasingly likely to experience adversity than those that are not due to possible significant developmental, behavioral, and emotional (Marriott, 2018). These problems can develop into severe mental health problems such as depression (Marriott, 2018). The traumatization of separation or removal from their families may increase the negative experiences and social issues in and outside of foster care among the children and the areas of complications (Hambrick et al., 2016; Marriott,

2018). The idea of separation from family increases the percentage of social issues and traumatic adversarial experiences among the people involved (Damian et al., 2018).

Among the biopsychosocial model multisystem of biological, psychological, and social factors, assessments to understand health, high-quality mental health screenings have been limited to assessing youth entering home care (Kilbourne et al., 2018; Szilagy, 2018; Wood et al., 2021). Under poor academic preparation to pursue postsecondary education or job readiness training, foster care alumni experience high unemployment rates, which are 48.3% higher than for the general population at 79.9%, due to limited work histories and job training opportunities (Kim et al., 2019; Powers et al., 2019). In addition, foster care alumni who are employed obtain jobs at a lower wage, which heightens their risk of poverty when living independently (Kim et al., 2019). Social work and criminal justice professionals need to become aware of the association between mental help-seeking and employment services. Becoming aware of the association may aid in measuring employment hope outcomes for low-skilled and low-employed foster care alumni to capture the psychological aspect of mental help-seeking (Damian et al., 2018; Plowden et al., 2016; Watt & Kim, 2019).

While clinical professionals addressing the unmet mental health needs and employment development of foster care youth illuminate essential findings, there exists a gap in the literature on foster care youth mental health service use and level of employment hope later in life (Hambrick et al., 2016; Marriot, 2018; Watt & Kim, 2019). I have found few studies that have included a degree of mental help-seeking behaviors associated with foster care alumni males' employment hope (Miller & Ison, 2020;

Plowden et al., 2016; Pryce et al., 2017). Being emancipated from foster care is challenging for this transition-aged population as they are met with adult responsibilities and hardships (entering the work industry and higher percentages of mental health disparities) with limited to no family or social support (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2019b).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this Spearman correlational study was to determine whether there is a positive association between employment hope and mental help-seeking among foster care alumni. The study's findings contributed to understanding the psychological needs and association among the mental help-seeking behaviors of African American foster care alumni men with depression and employment hope in a rural setting in the U.S. Southeastern region.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

RQ: Is there a positive association between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among foster care alumni males with depression?

$H_0$ : There is no statistically significant positive association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant positive association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study was based on a conceptual framework of two theories, the social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985).

### **The SCCT**

The SCCT is a new theory that explains the aspects of occupation. Developed by Lent et al. (1994; see also Lent et al., 2002) on the foundation of Bandura's 1986 social cognitive theory (SCT), the SCCT is an approach aimed at clarifying three interrelated aspects of career development, including (a) how primary academic and career interests develop, (b) how educational and career choices are made, and (c) how academic and career success is obtained (Lent et al., 2002). Considering foster care alumni, their backgrounds, and environmental influences, the use of SCCT models (interests, choice, and performance) in this study could explain how interest and choices surrounding career efficacy will develop over time. The SCCT model supports and guides the research problem in the absence of a formal theory.

### **The TPB**

The guidelines of the TPB are linked to a core group of factors developed by Ajzen in 1985. This theory was formerly known as the theory of reasoned action in 1980 (Ajzen, 1985). It is a paradigm that predicts an individual's intention to engage in specific behavior at a time and location (Ajzen, 1985). The TPB in this Spearman correlational study helped address ways for professionals to take a collaborative approach to understand the challenges and risk factors for poor independent living skills that foster

care alumni handle. These risk factors include their behavioral intentions to seek high quality access to care. The TPB model informs this Spearman correlational research study research question. Overall, the TPB is relevant to this study because this focuses on behaviors and actions of individuals. This theory provides an in-depth look into the choices and performance of individuals. It helped me explain the behaviors and attitudes with respect to the association between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among foster care alumni males with depression.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this dissertation, I conducted a quantitative study. I chose a quantitative method instead of a qualitative method because of the more structured capacity to use Likert scales to collect numerical data that can be analyzed statistically (Allen, 2017). Choosing the quantitative method allows a researcher to explore the relationships among variables. In this study, the quantitative approach allowed me to examine the challenges of mental health and employment in the social world among foster care alumni with depression (Allen, 2017).

The nature of the Spearman correlational study includes finding the degree of associations between employment hope and mental help-seeking with a Spearman correlational approach (see Zar, 1974). This correlational research design is appropriate because of the measurement of the strength and monotonic direction of the association among employment hope and mental help-seeking among foster care alumni in the Southeastern United States. The dependent variable is employment hope, whereas the independent variable is the intention to seek access to mental health-related services.

Spearman rank correlation is one of the oldest significant types of nonparametric tests that does not make any underlying assumptions and can be quantitatively measured (Zar, 1974).

A quantitative survey method is consistent with a standard format emphasizing the quantification of attitudes and/or behaviors of populations such as Spearman's ranks about the distribution of two correlated sets of variables (Nardi, 2018; Spearman, 2010). The outcome of a Spearman rank correlation approach can show a (-1) positive and or a (+1) negative correlation effect size/correspondence or no monotonic association (Spearman, 2010). Data outcomes within this nonparametric test should be ranked on an ordinal scale (Spearman, 2010). In the study, I used a Spearman correlational analysis to test the null hypothesis by measuring the degree of the association between mental help-seeking and employment hope with the Short Employment Hope Scale (EHS-14) and the Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale (MHSIS).

### **Definitions**

The following terminology is used throughout the content of this study and is defined for the research:

*Black/African American*: An ethnic group referred to and/or used interchangeably as in total or partial ancestry (OED Online, 2021.).

*Depression*: A common mood disorder and the dissipation of dark despair that interferes with the psychological function and cognitive control of affectional bonded associations, engagement in society, self-care, permanence, and career competence (LeMoult & Gotlib, 2019).

*Employment hope:* The aspect of vocational psychology and the expectations of economic self-sufficiency and empowerment for work skills and resources as a workforce developmental process in finding pathways to employment (Hong et al., 2019).

*Foster care alumni:* Adults who are 18 and over who formerly received foster care support and likely experienced historical trauma and transitional issues that impact their independent life (Olson & Cohen, 2017).

*Mental help-seeking:* A communicative coping process for the need for personal and psychological aid to obtain formal and informal resources to manage mental health concerns, conditions, and illnesses (Velasco et al., 2020).

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions have been made about this Spearman correlational study. First, I assumed that the Likert scales used would elicit reliable scaling responses. Secondly, I assumed research participants would understand the survey and respond by supplying honest and truthful responses on their behavioral intentions and level of employment hope. Lastly, I assumed that research data must be ordinal and the results/scores on the variables must be monotonically related.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study is narrow in scope and has inclusion criteria for participant selection. The focus of this study is on determining the association of mental help-seeking and employment hope among Black male foster care alumni. For this study, research participants are demographically identified as 18 to 26 years old and living in a rural setting in the Southeastern United States.

Within that scope, there are delimitations. Included in this study are only those Black male foster care alumni who suffer from depression. Excluded from this study are those who live outside of the Southeastern United States, any individual who did not identify as Black or African American, and other populations who are still in care or currently transitioning out of care.

### **Limitations**

This Spearman correlational study also has several potential limitations. The study's limitations are that data must be linear and independent from each other because, as the researcher, I cannot determine the flow between the variables (see Spearman, 2010). Another limitation of this research is the moderate complexity of the tool, which sometimes can be misinterpreted. In addition, Spearman rank correlation cannot measure causality, differences, or effect; it only measures associations (Spearman, 2010). With the quantitative survey research method, the limitations and challenges are that (a) self-administered surveys can sometimes be inflexible due to unclear questions and that more than one participant may have difficulty understanding, and (b) lack of responses from the population of research participants can cause an error in the research (Nardi, 2018). Errors may arise because correlational research does not show causation. Both studied variables may not necessarily cause the other to occur or represent the truth (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). A small sample size may impart inadequate statistical strength with generalizability, leaving the study results nongeneralizable to the research question and targeted population (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Therefore, a small sample size may impart inadequate statistical strength because applying study results to similar targeted



populations and settings beyond the sample cannot be done (Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

Thus, content validity on the survey questionnaire may not have all the possible questions (Almanasreh et al., 2019). A limitation may be found in the ability quantitatively assess for relevancy to and/or represent the targeted construct accurately (Almanasreh et al., 2019). Using precautions and numerically related data and employing survey research protocol is imperative to the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are several potential areas of significance for this study for both scholarship and practice. Regarding scholarship, the results of this study may provide information regarding whether there is a significant relationship between Black male foster care alumni with depression who seek mental help services and employment and those who do not. A significant association between employment hope and mental help-seeking may prompt later research about the direction and relative merits of related aspects of mental health-seeking and job-seeking dispositions.

There are also potential implications for practitioners and social change. Policymakers and legislators may prioritize serving foster care alumni by supplying funding and resources to address mental health illnesses and psychiatric disabilities. Policymakers may use the results of this Spearman correlational study to make decisions and distribute resources to frontline mental health practitioners. The study results may help the mental health professionals evaluate the quality of care received by the male foster care alumni and intention and skills concerning employment hope. In addition, the results may develop the mental health practitioners learning of evidence-best practices

and evaluation strategies in implementing effective transitions and treatment plans to reduce client reluctance and increase self-determination.

### **Summary**

Dealing with depression is vital across all communities. This is especially the case in seeking mental health-related services and finding meaningful employment including the ethical challenges mental health clinicians facing in treating foster care youth (Marriott, 2018; Plowden et al., 2016). Mental health care can be vital for Black male foster care alumni, who struggle with depression and the combined pressures of sociocultural realities (Plowden et al., 2016). Further research and support are needed to examine the association of mental help-seeking and employment hope among Black male foster care alumni with depression. The application of SCCT and TPB approaches allows for an interpretation of the findings and to discuss implications for foster care alumni and mental/behavioral health professionals. This interpretation and discussion may add knowledge to the societal-level problem. Therefore, determining the association between seeking mental help with depression and finding meaningful employment is the first step toward improving the outcomes within this vulnerable population. If the root of their issues can be addressed, the intention to seek access and employment can be improved.

This chapter provided an introduction to the study of Black male foster care alumni with depression, behavioral intentions, and willingness to seek mental help. I explained the purpose of the study and presented the research question and hypotheses. The significance of the study was also provided. The quantitative method, Spearman Correlational Research, was discussed and rationalized for use in this study, and the

SCCT and the TPB models. In the next chapter, I review the literature relevant to the study area, including mental help-seeking, employment hope, depression, foster care, and foster care alumni. I will also describe the narrative image of the origins of development of foster care and the legislative acts and outcomes after foster care. Furthermore, the research in the next chapters is focused on one cultural context. This context is based on mental help-seeking and employment hope, regarding the impacts experienced after foster care.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this Spearman correlational study was to determine whether there is a positive association between employment hope and mental help-seeking among foster care alumni. The study findings contributed to understanding the psychological needs and association among the mental help-seeking behaviors of African American foster care alumni men with depression and employment hope in a rural setting in the U.S. Southeastern region. After emancipation from care, independent living may lead to social exclusion, which may create stressors psychologically and economically among foster care alumni males with depression (NCSL, 2020). For example, transition plans for foster care alumni to engage in improving independent living skillsets and cognitive behavior create an opportunity for behavioral personnel providers in forensic settings (i.e., medical facilities or correctional settings) (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Villagrana & Lee, 2020). Also, in forensic settings it may help behavioral personnel providers to innovatively use prevention/intervention strategies after emancipation (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Villagrana, 2020).

Although there is current literature on the association between depression and help-seeking behaviors among foster care alumni, there were limited scholarly journal articles that examined the association of mental help-seeking and employment hope among Black male foster care alumni with depression (Plowden et al., 2016; Pryce et al., 2017). In a few studies, quantitative researchers have studied psychological human behavior and attributes relevant to racial/ethnic differences. However, further research is needed to address the psychosocial and developmental outcomes among foster care

alumni of African American descent to fill the literature gap (Hambrick et al., 2016; Marriot, 2018).

In this literature review, I describe the relevant literature related to the phenomenon of this Spearman correlation study to show a comprehensive understanding of the societal problem among the targeted population. The contents of this chapter include the following: the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, literature of the key variables, synthesis of the literature, and the chapter summary/conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The scholarly journals and articles referenced in the literature review focus on how sociocultural realities influence Black male foster care alumni's intentions and psychological functioning to seek mental help and have a sense of employment hope. The section is arranged logically to help readers understand the history of Black male foster care alumni's inclination to accessing mental health-related services and finding employment after care and future implications for change for this vulnerable population. The section culminates with an analytical review of recent studies that include suggestions calling for further research. The search for current (2016–2021) articles resulted in ninety-three peer-reviewed articles. This primary search was conducted via the Walden University Library. I accessed EBSCO, Elsevier, the National Center for Biotechnology Information; PsycARTICLES; PsycTESTS; PubMed; Sage Journals, Science Direct, Springer, and Taylor and Francis Online. For added databases accessed, I used the Google Scholar search engine. Keywords that I searched included *foster care alumni* and *depression*, *African American foster care alumni with depression*, *mental*

*help-seeking, employment hope, mental health, Black male foster care alumni, mental health-related services, employability, issues of career development, and mental health care needs.* Variations of this terminology were used to ensure exhaustive searches, including the review of 110 titles related to foster care alumni and mental help-seeking.

### **Conceptual Framework**

For this Spearman correlational research study, I included two theories, the SCCT and the TPB, as the underpinning conceptual framework (see Brown & Lent, 2013; Lent, 2013; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). The purpose of aggregating this conceptual framework's SCCT and TPB theoretical elements was to determine the connection between the variables. The SCCT model connects to this framework by outlining the process during which this targeted population forms interests, make decisions, and attains achievements in employment-related pursuits and receive mental help relevant to TPB (Brown & Lent, 2013; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). TPB is relevant to this study because it explains how the behavioral beliefs of foster care alumni can be influenced by their negative experiences and perceptions about the difficulty of obtaining employment and seeking therapy when overwhelmed with social pressure (Ajzen, 2011; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). Their cultural beliefs, social barriers, support systems, and learning experiences impede their employment hope interests (Glosenberg et al., 2019; Lent & Brown, 2019; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). These factors also impede their goals and consequences of seeking mental health related services that, under TPB, elucidates their personal development, self-efficacy, and occupational expectations (Glosenberg et al., 2019; Lent & Brown, 2019; Morren & Grinstein, 2021).

## **The SCCT**

The SCCT is based on the SCT, developed by Bandura (1986, as cited in Lent et al., 2002). The SCT theory focuses on areas of psychological functioning involving human development, adaptation, behavior, and change from three critical modes of agency (Bandura, 2002). The agencies include direct personal agency (exercised individually), proxy agency (individuals who rely on others to secure self-desired outcomes), and collective agency (act in concert to shape future; Bandura, 2002). The cognitive formulation of SCT agencies influenced Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT theory interrelated aspects of career development.

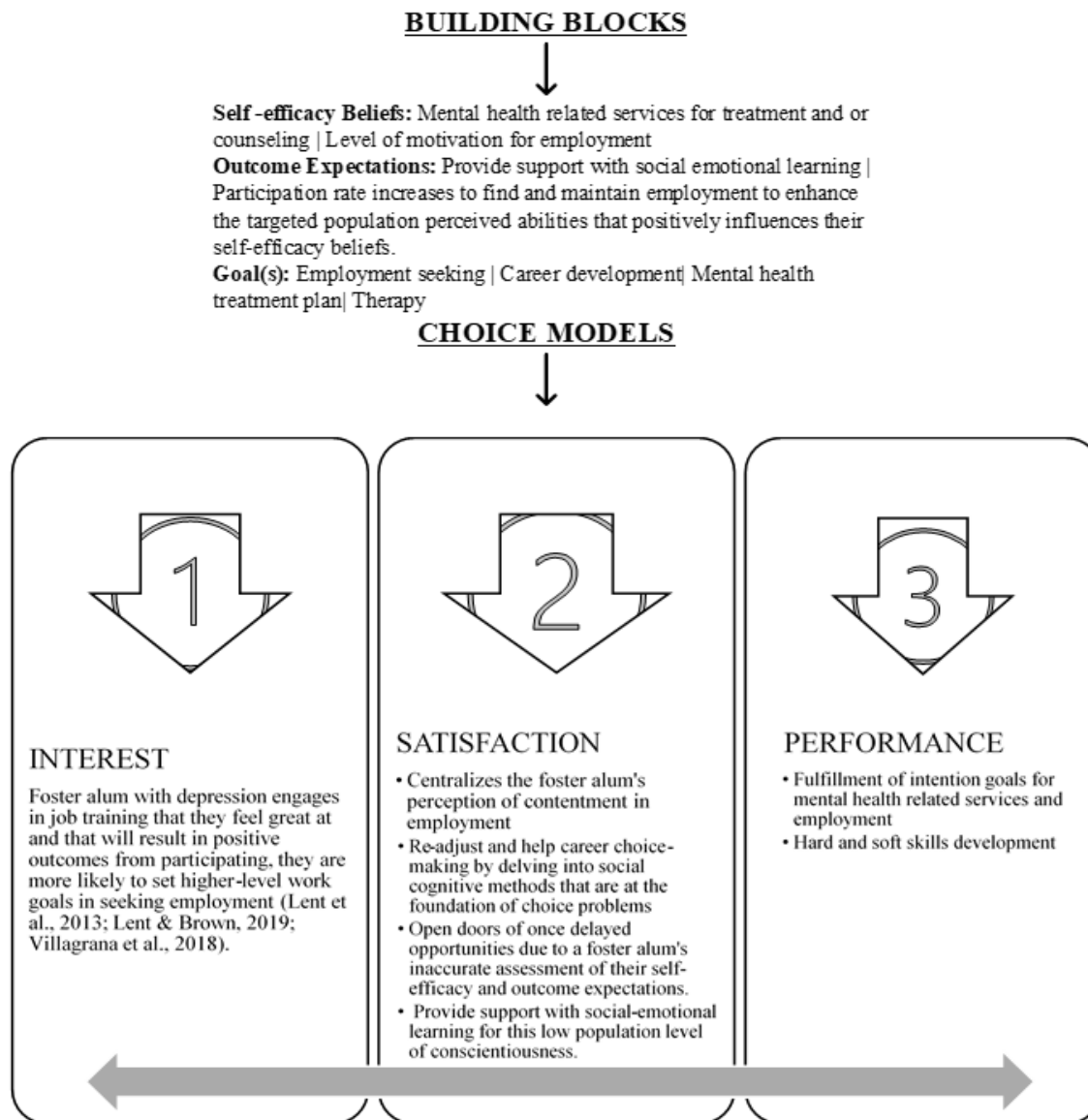
According to Lent et al. (1994), SCCT was aimed at clarifying interrelated aspects of career development, including how forming a starting point for academic and career interests develops, how choices are made from an educational and career perspective as well as how both are obtained (Brown & Lent, 2013; Lent, 2013). Thus, SCCT is an influential theory of cognitive and motivational practices that posits and expands across health behaviors, education and work performances, and organizational development that links its four building blocks (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals; Lent et al., 2002). The SCCT model has been used in earlier literature to connect to career-related contexts in understanding the process during which this study's targeted population (a) forms interests, (b) makes decisions and attains achievements in employment-related pursuits, and (c) receives mental help (Brown & Lent, 2013; Morren & Grinstein, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Schoenfeld et al., 2017).

The SCCT relates to this study in multiple ways. First, it includes concepts such as interests, abilities, values, and environmental factors that foster care alumni experience after exiting care (Brown & Lent, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2019). Most of the youth in care are provided a transition plan before emancipation from foster care; they are often not ready to engage in the work industry (Hernandez & Lee, 2020). Thus, I used the SCCT in this study as a framework to understand various aspects of the male foster care alumni personal beliefs about their interest in seeking mental help and their level of motivation toward employment. I also used the SCCT to address how the depressed foster care alumni male function in environments in social persuasion and physiological emotional states after emancipation from foster care. The challenging demands of independent living make it difficult for this population to navigate emotional wellness and self-efficacy (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Villagrana, 2017). Therefore, SCCT concepts apply to counseling interventions and may prevent and manage depression (Lent & Brown, 2019; Park & Zarate, 2019). The SCCT concepts are linked to self-efficacy beliefs, influences of ability, outcome expectations, and performance goals on success and persistence (Brown & Lent, 2013; Lent, 2013; Lent et al., 2002). The SCCT model posits that this population's growth to adulthood limiting mechanisms associated with career readiness planning and stable economic and/or mental health conditions (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Lent, 2013).

Based on the SCCT, there are certain levels of performance that initially lead to three distinct models. These three models focus on explaining the experiences in which people (a) develop career interests, (b) create and enact career choices, and (c) achieve



career success (Lent et al., 1994). However, the employment experiences that foster care alumni may encounter are based on socio-structured forces (i.e., poverty, unemployment, and unequal access to health care; Amechi, 2016). Also, foster care alumni may develop self-sufficiency in independent living, which is now beginning to be understood and recognized as a persistent opportunity gap for foster care youth (Amechi, 2016). Brown and Lent (2013) and Lent et al. (1994) stated that the SCCT consists of building blocks (i.e., self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals) that work within its choice models (i.e., interest, performance, and satisfaction), as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) Interrelated Model*

*Note.* Adapted from “Social Cognitive Model of Career Self-Management: Toward a Unifying View of Adaptive Career Behavior Across the Life Span,” by S. D. Brown and R. W. Lent, 2013, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(4), pp. 557-568

(<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033446>); “Social Cognitive Career Theory at 25: Empirical

Status of the Interest, Choice, and Performance Models,” by R. W. Lent & S. D. Brown, 2019, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 115 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.06.004>); and “Perceived Self-Stigma in the Utilization of Mental Health Services in Foster Care and Post Foster Care Among Foster Care Alumni,” by M. Villagrana, C. Guillen, V. Macedo, & S. Lee, 2018, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 85, pp. 26–34 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2017.10.040>).

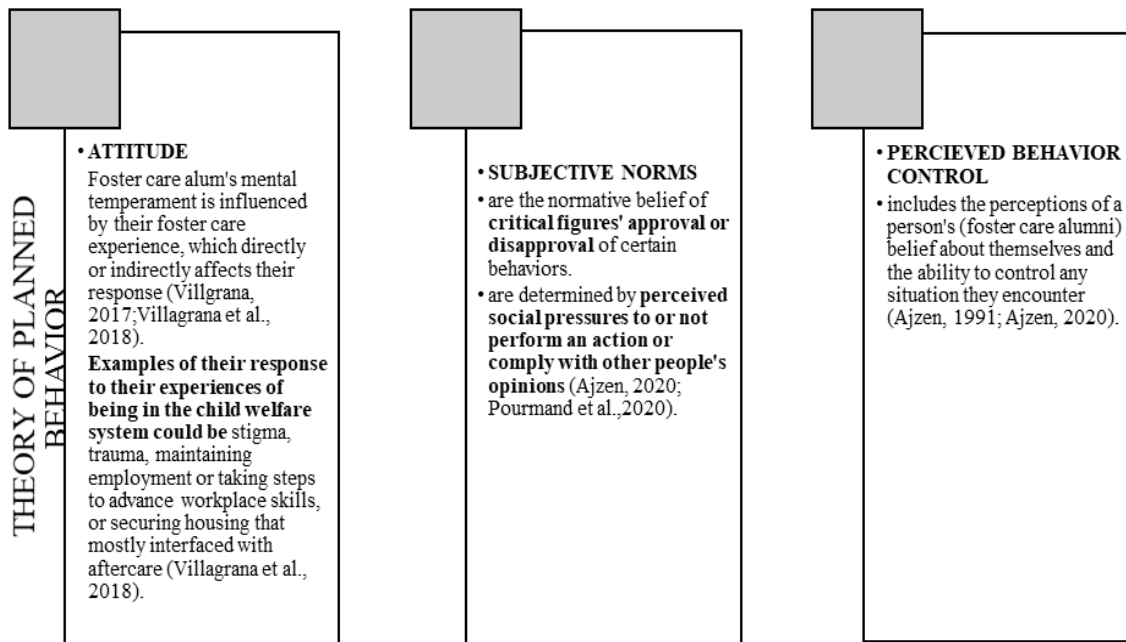
Within the SCCT, choices are influenced by the foster alumni’s environment as they tend to pursue those outcomes of training/programs they see as achievable and enjoyable (Lent & Brown, 2013). Because choices are influenced by their surroundings and/or ethnicity/gender, foster alums sometimes struggle to make choices about social and material resources (Olson et al., 2017). However, they often lack time to reason about decisions, deal with a problem, and/or think logically before deciding about something constant like applying for a job (Olson et al., 2017). What a foster alum perceives as opportunities for accomplishing job success, after care, is shaped by their past and work performance in evidence-based programs that focus on 21st-century workplace skills (Lent & Brown, 2019; Villagrana et al., 2018).

### **The TPB**

Although there may be multiple variations of 21st-century workplace skills, the individual work performances and specific behavioral engagement within evidence-based programs are assessed with models like the TPB, the second framework employed in this study. TPB was developed by Ajzen (1985), formerly known as the theory of reasoned action in 1980; it is a paradigm that predicts an individual’s intention to engage in

specific behavior at a particular time and location (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017; SPH-Boston University, n.d.). TPB is a behavior modification framework that distinguishes between three elements that lead to the formation of a behavioral intention, including attitudes (i.e., a person's thoughts), subjective norms (i.e., social pressure to or not perform), and perceived behavioral control (i.e., self-perception; Ajzen, 2011; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). TPB is applied to understanding and predicting behavioral intentions about a person's (e.g., a foster alum's) desires to perform a behavior based on underlying belief structures: behavioral, normative, and control (Ajzen, 2011; Morren & Grinstein, 2021; Si et al., 2019).

I used TPB in this study to describe the formation of the foster care alumni males' attitude towards seeking mental health-related services from behavioral health professionals to assess their subjective probabilities (see Ajzen, 2020; Morren & Grinstein, 2021). I also used TPB as an aid for understanding the participants' mental health behaviors, decisions to engage in therapy and career-related activities, and their expectation of self-control (see Conner & Norman, 2021; Lindgren & Weck, 2021). Thus, TPB belief constructs (i.e., attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control) shape the ability to exert cognitive control (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) Model*

Furthermore, TPB relates to this study in several ways. For example, TPB explains how likely foster care alumni males with depression are to seek mental help and sustain employment hope in a rural setting (see Ajzen, 2011, 2020). It has been applied in quantitative analyses and other research methodologies in predicting individual behaviors, including the disciplinary domain of environmental science, hypertension, and patients' self-care. The first part of the TPB model in this study is used to understand the Black/African American male foster care alumni's behaviors, perceptions, and attitude towards seeking help. For this study, TPB's focus on the behavior of interests will characterize the shaping of this population's psychological and economic self-sufficiency level in workforce development (see Brown et al., 2019; Fusco, 2020). Secondly, the belief outcome and evaluation determined whether the foster care alumni's actions would

produce the desired outcome (see Bracke et al., 2019). Thirdly, the TPB approach highlighted the substantial differences with this population's self-perception in applying for a job (see Ajzen, 2011; Bracke et al., 2019). Considering the substantial differences, TPB showed the targeted population's inadequacy, lack of independent living skills, or incapability to adapt to their environment (see Ajzen, 2011; Bracke et al., 2019).

Adaptability is a key element within the TPB approach. One of the TPB propositions is exploring the constructs of a person's control of their behavior, including attitudes, behavioral intention, subjective norms, social norms, perceived power, and perceived behavioral control (SPH Boston University, n.d.). This TPB proposition provides the rationale for community resources that may influence cultural and professional attitudes about seeking mental health-related services (Ajzen, 2011). Other TPB applications include the constructs to centralize focus on the impact of the changing nature of employment hope on foster care alumni (Ajzen, 2011; Hoaknson et al., 2019). Additional TPB applications include the constructs to improve what this population believes their employment options are, and that may show the societal barriers addressing treatment gaps (Ajzen, 2011; Hoaknson et al., 2019). Also, TPB helped me understand the background factors, such as personality traits and depression, in influencing beliefs to foster care alumni hold (see Ajzen, 2011).

## **Literature Review of Key Variables**

### **History of Foster Care**

The eras of foster care in the United States evolved through organizational movements dating back to biblical times. Research about these biblical times highlight

foster homes/child welfare linkage to foster care systematic methods. The foster care systematic methods have increased from the origins of its development to societal impacts and barriers among vulnerable populations like foster care alums.

### ***Origins of Development***

The foster care system is where children's needs and temporary placement are integrated into child welfare services (Font & Gershoff, 2020). The earliest form of foster care was founded in religious texts, the Old Testament and Talmud, which centralized the imperatives for societal care for all children (Myers, 2006; National Foster Parent Association [NFPA], n.d.). The first orphanage in the United States was initially approved in New Orleans by Ursuline nuns in 1728 (Myers, 2006). However, the first public orphanage, Charleston Orphan House, in Charleston, South Carolina opened a few years after in 1790 (Myers, 2006). Also, a societal task response to Christian church records showed that children lodged with widows received compensation from a congregation (Myers, 2006; NFPA, n.d.). Contrarily, foster care is a form of intervention that is resourcefully assimilated and globally used for the entry/exit regimes in child welfare, which exist differently in foster care placements (Wulczyn & Halloran, 2017). Caring for children in the United States was founded as a duty under the law to eliminate child maltreatment (Font & Gershoff, 2020; Myers, 2006).

### ***English Poor Laws (1500s)***

English Poor laws were enacted in the 1500s. In 1562, English Poor Laws authorized underprivileged children into indentured service until they became age appropriate for adults and group needs of continuity, lineage, or labor (Askeland, 2006;

Myers, 2006). These laws led to children being placed into a family foster care statute in the United States, which ignited the (1853) Orphan Train Movement (Askeland, 2006; Myers, 2006).

### ***Modern Day Foster Care (1853)***

The modern-day foster care began in the mid-1800s. The Orphan Train Movement was established by the New York Children's Aid Society (CAS) founder, Charles Loring Brace (Johnson & Batista, 2017; Myers, 2006). He implemented an innovative foster care system plan that provided stable homes to orphans through advertising in the south and west regions for families to become a foster home/parent (Johnson & Batista, 2017; Myers, 2006). A poverty crisis had stricken New York City in the Charles Brace era including the outstripping of employment, housing, and services. By the 1990s, about 100,000 children lived in orphanages (Myers, 2006). In addition, in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States, children's needs became a central focus after the infamous principle "best interest of the child" (Askeland, 2006; Johnson & Batista, 2017; Myers, 2006).

### ***Foster Care Stability: Shifting of Laws and Federal Government Leadership (the 1900s)***

The existing system, including employment and foster care administration, began in the early 20th century. For security, local agencies in the early 20th century began compensating and monitoring foster parents by keeping records and considering children's needs upon placement (Myers, 2006). The foster care system has evolved with public awareness about the increasingly intergenerational abuse of children and its foster



child bill of rights has seemingly increased the attention from government officials (Hernandez & Lee, 2020). By the 1900s, government officials passed laws to prevent child abuse and neglect and to focus on home life and stability for children (Myers, 2006). After the passing of the Social Security Act (1935), the U.S. federal government approved the first federal grants for payments to the states for child welfare services such as Children Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA; Cohen, 1983). In 1974, CAPTA was enacted by Congress as the first form of federal legislation addressing child abuse and neglect (Clay et al., 2019; Jimenez, 1990). It required states to identify child abuse reporting investigations and procedures, which resulted in many children being removed from their biological homes and being placed into the foster care system (Clay et al., 2019; Jimenez, 1990). Children are placed in the foster care system because there are situations where they are met with extreme turmoil (abuse, neglect, or exploitation) beyond their control, which makes it unsafe for them to remain in their biological homes (Ramey, 2019). Most children placed in the foster care system stay in there for years and/or days, depending on their age at entry time as it relates to foster care cases (Ramey, 2019).

### **Foster Care Now: Cases and Court Systems**

#### ***Cases***

Most foster care cases include many social factors that affect frontline personnel provision of services within the fields of social work and/or criminal justice who work along with vulnerable populations (Jonson-Reid et al., 2019). Therefore, resources for vulnerable populations are organizations like the ABA Center on Children and the Law

(Carter, 2017). The ABA Center on Children and the Law contribute to vulnerable populations by promoting their mission of changing the trajectory of governing laws, policies, and judicial procedures that are affecting foster youth through their regular contributions (Carter, 2017). These regular contributions include advocating for justice for youth in abuse and neglect matters and safety and welfare issues, facilitating coordination with attorneys and caseworkers, attending court postponements, and court training for child welfare personnel (Carter, 2017). Not having to navigate the complexities of the human-built/ legal system is a plus to youth, especially to those who have faced unlawful treatment (Aviles & Grigalunas, 2018; Hernandez & Lee, 2020). In a court of law, children placed in foster care legal issues begins in the courtroom (Aviles & Grigalunas, 2018; Carter, 2017; Font & Gershoff, 2020). A courtroom where criminal justice personnel-related professionals assess cases to best meet the needs of their foster youth clients through systematic goal-oriented case plans (Aviles & Grigalunas, 2018; Carter, 2017; Font & Gershoff, 2020).

### ***Court Systems***

For evaluations and casework histories, the court's justice decides on the type of institutional placement for foster youth especially if it helped developed a neglected child versus co-occurring supervision neglect (Font et al., 2018; Simmons, 2020). Having a systematic method for studying the court systems helps determine what could work (Jonson-Reid et al., 2019; Simmons, 2020.). The foster care system is an essential part of society's response to ensure that systematic guidelines and policies for foster youth are met (Hacsi,1995). Legislatures contribute to securing funding for prevention/intervention

and career-ready programs for academic, life skills, and career development (Font et al., 2018; Simmons, 2020). Thus, connecting children to evidence-based services provides child welfare professionals with a practical approach to using their knowledge in understanding trauma-informed care (Kerns et al., 2016). Also, connecting child welfare professionals to evidence-based services may help them identify mental health/basic needs among foster care youth who have experienced child maltreatment (Kerns et al., 2016). The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACA, n.d.) supported families by advocating for policies and practices, leadership development training, and educational information to ensure that youth in the foster care system have the needed support. The growth of children in foster care is steady and the intergenerational impact of transitioning into adulthood before and after exiting care has been a challenge within the foster care system when introduced into the United States (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Jonson-Reid et al., 2019).

### **Legislative Acts and Outcomes for Intergenerational Impacts**

Governing acts were put in place to aid states and localities for youth matriculating through the foster care system and to conduct funded programs to assist in emancipation from foster care. Transitional living is one of the needed support services for foster care alumni to be equipped with the necessary independent living skills to successfully be productive in everyday life (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2019). In everyday life, organizations may find a few child welfare policies, governing acts, and programs that have been put in place to help the older youth become self-sufficient and productive

citizens of society (Moynihan, 1988). These services place attention on the significant dilemmas seen throughout the child welfare delivery systems (see Appendix A).

### **Impact on Foster Care Alumni**

#### ***Depression: Long-Term Consequence***

Foster care alumni who age out of care are more likely to experience depression and have a higher risk of facing mental health problems later in life (Park & Zarate, 2019; Villagrana, 2017; Villagrana et al., 2018). Depression is an ascending mental health condition estimated to be the third top leading disability worldwide in 2015 and may increase public health issues (Park & Zarate, 2019). The condition of depression is an everyday part of the mental health sector. Depression symptoms (loss of interest in activities, sleeping too much, or negative thinking patterns) can range from mild to severe and are typically not symptoms that can be alleviated in one day (LeMoulta & Gotlibb, 2019). African Americans are more reluctant to access treatment, in which 58.2% from 18 to 25 and 50.1% of adults from 26 to 49 did not receive treatment in 2018 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration [SAMHSA], 2018). Between 2008 to 2018, severe mental illness grew among this population (SAMHSA, 2018). It is often historically carried into families, which could be hereditary or learned behavior that affects the onset of depression (Cullins et al., 2019; LeMoulta & Gottlieb, 2018). More factors that affect the onset of depression are biochemistry, personality, life circumstances, and other medical conditions (LeMoulta & Gotlibb, 2018).

**Biochemistry.**

Considering the onset of the contributing factors of depression, cognitive science has promoted an understanding of the biological aspects of depression (LeMoulta & Gotlibb, 2018). Depression has been connected to differences in the mind, particularly with serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine (Richardson & Adams, 2018). It is difficult to measure the number of neurotransmitters in a person's brain and movement (Schimelpfening, 2021). The adrenal medulla moves the norepinephrine substance (Park & Zarate, 2019; Schimelpfening, 2021). Norepinephrine affects the brain's part, reducing its neurotransmission that leads to depressive symptoms (Cherry, 2021; Schimelpfening, 2021). Other neurotransmitters in the brain, like serotonin, appear to be involved in the symptoms of depression as it contributes to wellbeing and happiness (Acker & Warner, 2020). For example, testing for depression lately has boosted the attention rate of the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) that now requests adequate follow-up appointments to discuss the need for behavioral health services to integrate (Olfson et al., 2016). The depressive symptoms include low energy, lack of alertness, challenges focusing and concentrating, and decreased cognitive abilities (Acker & Warner, 2020; Liu et al., 2018).

**Personality.**

An individual's personality may have an antecedent effect on depression (Fusco, 2020). A person's character (stable individual differences in emotions and its regulation) and temperament (individual differences due to socialization) are theoretical mechanisms of a person's personality as it relates to depression (Klein et al., 2018). Hence, theoretical

mechanisms of a person's personality can categorize the person's character into multiple factors: reliability, sociability, and/or self-confidence (Chik et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2019). The dysfunctional connectivity in negative-affect communication can show the impact of depression symptoms on a person's personality and the limitations of resources for those who identify with it as in foster care alumni (Cox et al., 2020; Fusco, 2020). On the other hand, foster care alumni become more individualistic after aging out of care and are more subject to negative life circumstances with few life skills (Wimsatt et al., 2020).

### **Life Circumstances.**

Individuals experience insecurity after aging out of the foster care system where they once had security (Tobolowsky et al., 2017). Depression can be sparked by traumatic life situations or other factors such as finding programs that offer shelter and food (Fusco, 2020). The loss of close relatives and friends, a divorce, financial struggles, unemployment, severe/mild mental health issues, self-isolation from socializing in public, and interpersonal relationships challenges affects how this population views and approach life (Collins et al., 2018). Foster care alumni tend to have periods of relationship conflict, whether marital or family-related, due to suppressing anger from earlier systemic issues in foster homes (Collins et al., 2018; Fusco, 2020). For instance, African American people living below poverty are twice as likely to account for acute psychological distress than those living more than twice the poverty level (CDC, 2018).

### **Other Medical Conditions.**

The general prevalence of depression like other medical conditions are at a steady rate such as diabetes and migraines (Pashaki et al., 2019). According to Ajuwon and

Love (2020), Type 2 diabetes mellitus in African Americans is at about 25%, and associates with depression in some cases. The rate of help-seeking and/or care services received in this population is lower than in other ethnic communities, heightening the number of visits to the emergency hospital and reducing the number of doctor appointment visits annually (Collins et al., 2018; Villagrana et al., 2018). Individuals of this population require supportive and trusting collaborations with frontline providers for the ongoing self-management of complex conditions such as diabetic glycemic control and depression (Ajuwon & Love, 2020). While complexity is typical in depression, neuroticism influences the severity of depression in people who suffer from migraines (Mental Health Weekly Digest [MHWD], 2020). The emotional stability of neuroticism relates to direct and indirect illnesses concerning psychopathology and personality (Karsazi et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Therefore, neuroticism is sometimes characterized by other personality traits like extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness (MHWD, 2020).

### **African American Foster Care Alumni: Self-Sufficiency Navigation**

#### ***Cultural Competence***

Mental health disorders are prevalent among former foster care youth in the U.S. population, particularly among Black, male foster care alumni with depression (NCSL, 2019a; Turney & Wildeman, 2016). There are many labels that describe the challenges and conditions that affect African American and other ethnicities foster care alumni groups psychological functioning and career motivation, including burnout, emotional distress, hopelessness, trauma exposure, and placement type (Lee et al., 2018). Black

foster care alumni are unaware of mental health literacy, and they experience poorer health outcomes and unemployment (Bauer et al., 2020). Cross-cultural communication in seeking mental health care among this population are more discrete because of metaphors like “keep your business and feelings to yourself” (Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Phillips et al., 2018). These metaphors are examples of the social control of emotionally expressing the history of adversity from childhood until adulthood (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). Showing anything personal, as in what is displayed on social media outlets or in case files among licensed behavioral health physicians and counselors in a medical setting, is considered a sign of weakness (Ang, 2017; Gopalkrishnan, 2018).

Although there are varying cross-cultural communication in mental healthcare, learning about the aspects of mental illness and culturally proper communication among the Black foster care alumni community is an integral part of understanding acculturation (Bauer et al., 2020; Soto et al., 2018). Also, understanding about the aspects of mental illness and proper communication around varying subgroups like Black foster care alumni is an integral part of delivering adequate mental health treatment services (Bauer et al., 2020; Soto et al., 2018). Soto et al. (2018) explained that mental health treatments provided by therapists effectively align when the therapists are competently skilled and/or are knowledgeable in addressing subject matters according to the culture of the clients. Some foster care professionals have difficulty stimulating adulthood and promoting past experiences to enhance independent living skills and permanency in relationships (Steenbakkers et al., 2018). For example, the thought of shame is likely a pertinent barrier across Black/African American communities, which affects the



provision of quality mental health-related services and interactions between a mental health professional and a client with depression (Bauer et al., 2020). The services and support provided under behavioral/mental health professionals at different organizations may be inadequately tricky in a rural setting with more informal helpers than formal in the reluctance of treatment, trust, and insurance coverage (Hong et al., 2020). Not including client attributes when implementing treatment/transition plans can be an ethical failure and a negative impact on self-determination (Soto et al., 2018). Soto et al. (2018) explains that benefits from culturally adapted treatment than community and (0.04) at-risk samples produced fewer substantial benefits compared to clinical samples at Cohen's random weighted effect size of (.061). Behavioral health professionals communicating openly about care processes and allowing culturally adaptive interventions instead of focusing on personal biases and their childhood influences will reduce disparities (Soto et al., 2018; Steenbakkens et al., 2018).

### ***Dysfunctional Coping***

Childhood adversity shapes how individuals react to high-level stressors and circumstances in adulthood (Villagrana, 2017; Villagrana et al., 2018). Sheffler et al. (2020) explained that those who experience high-level stress develop dysfunctional coping mechanisms that impede psychological behaviors and foster complicated interpersonal relationships. Dysfunctional coping increases stressful emotions that may involve emotional distancing that Black male foster care alumni may engage in if a traumatic situation cannot be changed (Simpson, 2016). This form of coping employs toxicity, unforgiveness, deceit, or emotional isolation, such as self-harm (Simpson, 2016).

Considering these forms of coping gives a visual representation of the historical trauma that ignites coping through various psychological and behavioral strategies (Sheffler et al., 2020). These strategies include negative eating patterns and stressful situations that different ethnic groups often endure among foster care alumni, particularly Black males (Sheffler et al., 2020). However, the difficulty of stress with Black male foster care alumni and other underserved populations coping with problematic childhood situations like physical abuse may decrease their ability to control and resolve issues as adults (Sheffler et al., 2020). Thus, harmful behaviors are widely spread among ways of dysfunctional coping, which often grow into a consequential toxic coating, including substances used to cope, emotional isolation, self-blaming, and self-distraction (Suciu & Micluția, 2020). These harmful behaviors can lead to restrictive emotionality (Berke et al., 2018).

### ***Emotional Impact and Restrictive Emotionality***

Restrictive emotionality is defined as restraints to certain feelings like fear, guilt, and indignity, highlighting insecurities changed through a person's emotional response based on environmental demands (Berke et al., 2018; Heath et al., 2017). Restricted emotions can increase after a while and look like situational depression, low self-esteem, or psychological stress (Heath et al., 2017). Emotions are not easily shown in men, possibly because of their innate ability to not wear their emotions on their sleeves and their nonconstructive ideas about manhood (Smith, 2017). However, when people look at Black/African Americans, they are more detached from responding to health life challenges and feel stigmatized by their circumstances, making it hard to be engaged in

emotional awareness (Campbell, 2017). Emotions presented in this way play a distinct role in providing social services in the Black community (Campbell, 2017). Individuals of this community are trauma-sensitive and reluctant to take healthcare (Campbell, 2017; Marcos-Marcos et al., 2019; Smith, 2017). Additionally, the social determinants of health and the systematic employment inclusion impact this community and affect their access to quality healthcare and economic stability (Campbell, 2017; Marcos-Marcos et al., 2019; Smith, 2017). Research on African American men shows they are excessively exposed to detrimental issues to their mental health, which is difficult to manage emotionally and responsibly (Seidler et al., 2018).

Griffith and Cornish (2018) and Campbell (2017) explained that men particularly African American men are defined by attributes that reflect socio-cultural factors pertaining to age, cultural norms, and religious beliefs. Among depressed African American men and/or foster care alumni the prevalence of suppressing emotions can be painfully controlling and is sometimes self-defeating among this subpopulation (Griffith & Cornish, 2018). The sayings “men are not supposed to cry” and “toughen up” are comments often used by others towards men who shows even an inkling of their emotions (Žilinská & Smitková, 2017). For this reason, men of all ethnicities do not express their feelings and miss opportunities to get mental help (Žilinská & Smitková, 2017). For example, after aging out of care, they feel the stress of paying rent, higher education tuition, finding employment, and/or suffering from depression symptoms (Geiger et al., 2018; Villagrana et al., 2018). However, none of these feelings and thoughts come up in conversations or publicly due to negative criticism. The Man Up

Man Down (MUMD) Michigan 2009 initiative furthers mental and physical support for adult African American men about depression (Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture, and Health [CRECH], n.d.; Neighbors, 2018). In four cities (Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, and Raleigh), having thoughtful conversations was a strategy to get to the root of the true essence of manhood and African American men's idea and experiences of depression (CRECH, n.d.; Neighbors, 2018). An idea of a man's nature among African American men means providing as the sole proprietor of their family, achieving people's respect, and maintaining financial stability (Griffith & Cornish, 2018).

Transitioning from foster care to independent living includes increasing critical life skills. However, with critical life skills, there are often inconveniences (e.g., stability for employment preparation or seeking mental help) increase adverse mental health outcomes (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Stiawa et al., 2020). Because of roles, men tend to internalize embarrassment compared to women (Neighbors, 2018; Stiawa et al., 2020). For example, there is a common belief that men who publicly cry show more vulnerability that intersect with feminine behavior (Gough & Novikava, 2020). Gender roles with high dysfunctions of depression can negatively affect anyone's emotions and heighten reluctance to seek support because of socio-cultural barriers, especially among men (Gough & Novikova, 2020; Žilinská & Smitková, 2017).

### ***Rumination***

Processing the past often occurs in Black male foster care alumni as they need space to deal with their history (Fu, 2020; Villagrana, 2017). Thinking deeply about dark experiences non-stop is rumination that affects a person's mental health, which can build

up levels of depression (Aslan & Baldwin, 2021). Black male foster care alumni with depression may experience ruminative thinking that sometimes impairs their ability to think and process emotions (Fu, 2020; Villagrana, 2017). This occurrence typically may arise in thoughts of inadequacy about independent living, adaptability to the work industry, and memories of past trauma that ruminates in their mind (Weindl et al., 2020).

### ***Stigma and Negative Beliefs***

The stigma of seeking help for mental health concerns/illnesses has been a concern for providers and is high among young people (Villagrana et al., 2018). Stigma is a notion based on perceivable social characteristics that society considers undesirable (Ibrahim et al., 2019). There are varying forms of stigma, including social and self, that people are affected by as foster care alums (Villagrana et al., 2018). Many foster care alums suffer from negative stereotypes and unemployment stagnancy in which social service professionals realize that mental illness like depression can trigger cognitive functioning hindering decision making (Villagrana, 2017; Villagrana et al., 2018). Stigma is likely to reduce the likelihood of using mental health services and make low mental health rates worse (Wu et al., 2017). According to Villagrana et al. (2018), (38%) of former foster care youth secured mental health services and self-stigma continued after emancipation from foster care. On the other hand, most (62%) of the foster care alumni stigma related to their perception of behavioral/menta health professionals services with this population including lack of understanding and stereotypes (Villagrana et al., 2018). Black foster care alumni males with depression may derive resources and facts from

online social media and their individual experiences seeking mental help (Plowden, 2016; Villagrana, 2017).

### ***Emancipation***

About 20,000 youth ranging from ages 18 to 21 age out of care annually (iFoster, n.d.). After emancipation from foster care, older youth are met with adverse outcomes early on into adulthood (Hokanson et al., 2019). The support of state legislation and government officials that provides them with assistance lessens after leaving care (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Hokanson et al., 2019; Villagrana et al., 2018). Some of them reunify with their families, however, they may have limited resources with mental health related agencies/organizations considering the earlier issue that placed them in foster care (Hokanson et al., 2019). At 18, independence is not often achieved, and the youth do not automatically transition to adulthood; instead, they endure difficulty, including challenges with their personal and sexual orientation as well as showing emotional independence and maturity (NCSL, 2020). Concerning emancipation services, proving, and building rapport with a trusted adult supporter is needed given the traumatic experiences endured before entering foster care and after exiting foster care in some cases (Hokanson et al., 2019; NCSL, 2020).

### ***Employability***

Foster care alumni have tenuous socioeconomic situations that leave them to secure themselves financially (Geiger & Okpych, 2021; iFoster, n.d.; Papovich, 2019). Four years after aging out of care, 50% of foster care alumni have no income, heightening the unemployment rate despite the 34 million jobs accessible across the

nation (iFoster, n.d.). As a result, they are left unprepared for independence and do not have the necessary life skills to access employment opportunities or training programs in youth career development (Geiger & Okpych, 2021; iFoster, n.d.). Emancipating from foster care without residence is the highest risk of issues among foster youth after aging out (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017; Papovich, 2019). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2017), foster care youth with more placements had minor economic progression between the ages of 19 to 21 compared with those who had fewer placements. The unemployment rate is between 49% to 69% for foster alums, according to gender and age (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Living in placements while obsessing over constant and repetitive negative thoughts that uncovered memories of trauma from childhood into adulthood is challenging (Asland & Baldwin, 2021). Foster care youth who experienced group home placements did not reach the same economic progress level as peers who did not live in them (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Group home placements were associated with lower rates and hourly wages from 19 to 22 and 21 to 24 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Occurrences like this often led to the many challenges foster care youth face upon leaving the foster care system (Hernandez & Lee, 2020). Thus, 33% complete one year of some form of college, with 6% completing a 2- or 4-year degree by the age of 23, which leads to lower rates of suitable employment (Rosenberg & Kim, 2018). Workplace skills and experiences are critical for youth in the foster care system to develop employment hope as there are barriers to overcome after emancipation (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

### ***Employment Hope***

Meeting the demands of self-sufficiency like earning wages after emancipation from foster care appears to be one of the most persistent issues among foster alums. The notion of hope of earning enough income to make ends meet is a factor in finding a regular job, keeping the position, and/or gaining competitive job advantages (Hong et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2017). Although the search for employment presents challenges, it is more significant for foster youth leaving care (Peters et al., 2016). Challenges are more prevalent with this population because of psychological empowerment (competence, self-determination, and impact) and the motivation to achieve future goals, which is complicated by the lack of educational and career advantages, including undergrad/graduate school, job training (Job corps), work experience, and social connections for good-paying jobs (Hong et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2016). The notion of creating a better life economically after foster care is expected and the obstacles that may come along (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). Thus, surviving through the obstacles of juggling multiple hats including childcare aid, attending school full-time, transportation issues, pay schedules, or coping with a disability can be challenging for moving towards a secured future for themselves (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019). For example, Peters et al. (2016) stated that a female participant, age 22, lived in an apartment with her son but was recently homeless. She loved her job at a local restaurant but had to quit because she was ineligible for childcare aid due to not meeting the requisite (28) hours. (p. 47) However, the nature of a foster care alumni male navigating independence and interdependence are



also needed to build skillsets (self-determination, financial literacy) while in care for coming upon similar situations (Hokanson et al., 2019).

### ***Mental Help-Seeking Behaviors in Black/African American Culture***

Living through disruptive situations draws attention to problems later in adulthood that may affect behavioral health professional's approach to the psychological self-transformation of foster care alums. The principal focus in mental health-related services pertains to help-seeking behaviors regarding formal and informal help (Narendorf et al., 2018). Formal mental support within the Black/African American culture includes settings such as mental health centers, emergency rooms, and forensic professionals in public/service settings (Narendorf et al., 2018). While there is a greater reliance on informal mental help within this culture, there is a reliance on informal mental help from more relatable sources, including 40% from clergy/church congregations and 60% from family members and friends (Hays & Lincoln, 2017). The notion of racial prejudice and discrimination experiences affects lower mental help-seeking levels which is perceived as a form of dishonesty within the Black/African American community (Griffith & Cornish, 2018; Villagrana, 2017). These cultural norms inhibit mental help-seeking, the elucidation of help-seeking patterns, and highlight the importance of increasing the use of formal sources (Hays & Lincoln, 2017). The African American male population has a lower probability of seeking help for depression that heightens mental health services' underutilization (Plowden, 2016). This subpopulation of men like most men tend to suffer in silence and only get help in frustrating situations where they have no control (Plowden, 2016).

### *Spiritual Support*

Having control in mental help-seeking may connect to exploring the beliefs and values of experiences. Former foster care youth naming the meaning behind their experiences may include understanding the emancipation process, such as spiritual support (Dalencour et al., 2017; Hernandez & Lee, 2020). Spiritual support plays an invoking role in the narratives of former foster care youth stories about previous challenging situations they have experienced and/or are currently experiencing (Dalencour et al., 2017). Foster care alumni, particularly African Americans, find spiritual fulfillment as a guiding light for psychological and religious social support as well as knowing their purpose in life (Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2018). Most people in the African American community consult with religious leaders when they are in a season of emotional emptiness in their life or have endured traumas that still bother them in adulthood (Sisselman-Borgia et al., 2018). Spiritual support is looked at as a coping mechanism to equip vulnerable populations mentally, physically, and emotionally to build strong relationships in hopes of refraining from losing a sense of humanity (Özlem, 2020). Sisselman-Borgia et al. (2018) and Dalencour et al. (2017) suggested that for foster care alumni, substituting prayer and help is most likely prevalent to avoid health care services such as depression care. Policies for spiritual development involving faith-based organizations in foster care need to be implemented as an option for youth currently in and out of the foster care system (Dalencour et al., 2017).

### *Utilization of Mental Health Services*

Moving from place to place throughout foster care with people of different familial backgrounds sometimes affects communication, stability, and trust levels using mental health-related services. Villagrana et al. (2018) found that the usage of mental health-related services decreases after emancipation from foster care. The decreases are primarily because of self-stigma, and public stigma and no court order mandates services related to accessibility (Villagrana et al., 2018). For example, after emancipation, about 50% of African American youth used mental health services than 35% of Latino youth usage (Villagrana, 2017). Additionally, after one year of leaving foster care, the average treatment intensity was 27.43% lower for African Americans (Villagrana, 2017). The type of services of use given in billing claims among African Americans was (a) 24.8% individual behavioral therapy, (b) 57.3% group therapy, and (c) 10% crisis intervention (Villagrana, 2017). However, for other therapeutic services, 7.8% were used for all the following: (a) residential services, (b) psychotropic medications, and (c) day rehabilitation services (Villagrana, 2017). As a result, the avoidance of sharing was to shy away from the feeling of embarrassment among others (Villagrana et al., 2018; Villagrana, 2017). Showing confidential information could be detrimental or triggering to a person who has experienced foster care or suffers from depression (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Villagrana, 2017). Villagrana et al. (2018) stated a relatable excerpt from one of the research participant responses:

I just did not like people asking so many questions all the time. Cause, it was already weird enough for them to ask me, oh, why do you live with your cousin?

You know, it was like I was already getting a lot of that, and my cousin was really like not jealous of me, but she did show that jealousy. You know, like she would tell them like, oh, I do not like her living with me or something, you know. So, them knowing I was going to therapy was just not good, you know. I do not know. I feel like, they really view you differently once you're a foster kid, you know. (p. 29)

This excerpt shows the harmful impact of dominant beliefs about stigmas within a cultural subpopulation group on mental health service usage (Bracke et al., 2019). Public stigma beliefs have more impact than personal stigma beliefs related to intentions of seeking mental help (Bracke et al., 2019; Nearchou et al., 2018).

### **Key Points in Literature**

The culture around multidisciplinary teams of frontline behavioral healthcare professionals is vital. Studies of foster care alumni reveal reluctance in seeking and addressing mental health concerns (Hong et al., 2020; Villagrana et al., 2018). These mental health concerns are because of their feelings of emotional incompetence in self-expression, self-sufficiency, and challenges in building rapport with trusted mental health-related professionals (Hong et al., 2020). Villagrana et al. (2018) and Campbell (2017) proposed how cross-cultural challenges of integrating sociocultural and historical perspectives affect these populations' choices of informal/formal mental help and their role of income. These multilevel challenges among this population are influenced by spiritual support and self and public stigmas that decrease mental help-seeking and psychological empowerment/transformation (Nearchou et al., 2018; Pryce et al., 2017).

Services are presented across varying professional sectors. Behavioral health professionals should know how to develop critical appraisal skills to support the foster care alumni's rights to self-determination and knowledge of rumination effects on male depression in foster care alums, mainly Black/African Americans (Acker & Warner, 2020; Aslan & Baldwin, 2021). Helping individuals understand service options and decisions based on their thinking and behavior styles may help professionals find the personality trait related to the dynamic functional connectivity patterns in environment adaptation (Acker & Warner, 2020; Olson et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2019). On the other hand, Collins et al. (2018) and Häggman-Laitila et al. (2019) concluded that seeking healthcare services and employment after emancipation from foster care affects their independent living and career and academic interests. Collins et al. (2018) and Häggman-Laitila et al. (2019) found that emancipating from foster care leaves a multidimensional phase of the foster care alums' development as in life outcomes.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The peer-reviewed journal articles in this literature review examined employment hope and mental help-seeking among Black/African American foster care alumni males with depression. Similarly, the literature review centralized the relationship between mental help-seeking and employment hope. Studies in this review had information on literature search strategy, history of foster care, depression, spirituality, self-stigma, restrictive emotionality and emotional consequences, cultural competence, employment, use of mental health services, mental help-seeking, governing acts and programs, and the conceptual framework. Thus, this study will describe situational and societal factors that

may affect the targeted population's response to seeking help for mental health-related services and their level of motivation for employment success. The study will provide insight into the root of Black/African American male foster care alumni with depression intention and reluctance to seek help from a mental health professional and use skills and resources. The data collection analysis and the targeted population are outlined in Chapter 3 (the research method and design).

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this Spearman correlational study was to determine whether there is a positive association between employment hope and mental help-seeking among foster care alumni. The study findings contribute to understanding the psychological needs among the mental help-seeking behaviors of African American foster care alumni men with depression and employment hope in a rural setting in the Southeastern United States. This approach allows for understanding the phenomenon and its conceptual application. The applicability of the TPB and SCCT deductive approach for this study is discussed in depth in this chapter. The primary components of this chapter are the research design and rationale; the methodology, including population, sampling procedures, and procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; the data analysis plan, and ethical procedures.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In this dissertation, I conducted a quantitative study. This study is based on a quantitative descriptive design employing a Spearman rank-order correlation from low to high with a survey approach that measures ordinal level data scales (Spearman, 2010). It aims to describe the degree of the monotone association of the extent to which the statistical variables (employment hope and mental help-seeking) covary among Black/African American foster care alumni with depression via the Spearman correlation coefficient (Spearman, 2010). The foster care alumni were not randomly assigned, and I did not manipulate the independent and dependent variables (see Spearman, 2010). This Spearman correlation design is consistent with evaluating the significance of

relationships, including knowledge advancement in the discipline by the reliability of measurements and the internal and external reliability of this study's results (Campbell & Stanley, 1963/1966). Moreover, this design connects to the research question (Is there a positive association between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among foster care alumni males with depression?) because it pertains to a noncausal statistical association between the variables.

Mental health concerns are on the rise, and an increase in adverse outcomes seems to be evolving among vulnerably sensitive populations. Villagrana (2017) indicated that foster care alumni with mental health problems cope with more demanding challenges, such as being less likely to find employment and/or earning less after care than nonfoster care alumni. On the Likert scales, the research participants responded to questions about demographic data and information to seek help from mental health professionals if they had a mental health concern and psychological and economic self-sufficiency (see Appendix B). In this study, I measured the inclination of Black/African American male foster care alumni with depression to seek mental health-related support and employment hope.

Foster care alumni are met with unfavorable circumstances that vary in adult life (Font & Gershoff, 2020). These circumstances involve the differences in culturally competent practices of mental health professionals and accessing and trusting mental health services, particularly among Black/African American foster care alums (Font & Gershoff, 2020). An unfavorable change in a Black/African American foster care alum life situation maybe an exacerbation of economic hardship and severe emotional distress



(Font & Gershoff, 2020). Actions related to seeking mental health help (counseling or treatment) and employment hope (career motivation) is selected among the targeted population to focus on these areas. I assessed the associations between mental help-seeking and the factors of employment hope among the sample, Black/African American foster care alumni males with depression self-reports.

### **Methodology**

I chose the quantitative method for this study. This Spearman correlational study emphasized critical elements within the research design and rationale supporting the foundation of this quantitative approach. This allows more researchers to advance their knowledge in the discipline of this study and replicate the elements of the research gathered. In the following subsections, I chronologically describe methodology from the population, sampling and sampling procedures, recruitment and data collection procedures, data collection, instrumentation and operationalization of constructs, threats to validity, data analysis plan, research questions/hypotheses, and ethical procedures.

### **Population**

The targeted population is drawn from foster care alumni in a rural setting in the Southeastern United States. All research participants who fit the criteria were between ages 18 to 26 and identified as Black/African American males. Therefore, the selection criterion included research participants seeking mental help who identify with employment hope and are currently experiencing challenges with independent living, financial security, and mental health concerns/illnesses. The estimated population is at

least 400,000 or more across the United States. The targeted population is over 1,000 in the Southeastern United States, with a sample size of 128 (Brown, 2019).

### **Sampling**

Statistical inferences from the sampled subgroup were made using convenience and snowball sampling. The convenience sampling method was the primary technique used to develop the subset sample of the population under discussion within this Spearman correlational study. The snowball sampling method helped improve the data collection, for the prior research respondents suggested referrals of other interested research respondents due to accessibility in various locations (Efil & Negida, 2017). This strategy occurred for the threats to validity that appeared. However, convenience sampling was used to recruit respondents convenient to a researcher without acquiring patterns (Efil & Negida, 2017; Jager et al., 2017). The type of convenience sampling that was used within this study is homogeneous to obtain a narrower subpopulation (Jager et al., 2017). According to this method, convenience sampling is a facet of nonprobabilistic sampling that was not randomly assigned within this study (Efil & Negida, 2017). Participants selected for inclusion in this form of sampling are easily accessed, making it simpler to conduct research (Efil & Negida, 2017). This sampling process was easier to go through with a few governing rules for collecting the sample related to organizations/locations (Efil & Negida, 2017; Frey, 2018). In this Spearman correlational study, the samples were convenient respondents with data sources that met the screening criteria, which was a less expensive method to gather data than probabilistic sampling methods (Frey, 2018).

## **Sampling Procedures**

As the researcher, I determined the respondents' willingness and availability to participate. To access the sample, I narrowed the subgroup elements to Black/African American males with depression between ages 18 to 26. I focused on this age range because of new challenges according to cultural ethnic differences as in stigma associated with post emancipation earlier on into adulthood, which may acquire more evidence-based resources. This sample was obtained by the population from which it was drawn based on the convenience sampling method. I adhered to Walden's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by waiting to receive prior approval to conduct research. I also used Black/African American male respondents who were generally available online on social media platforms and found this Spearman correlational study appealing to participate in the process. Additionally, this procedure area was a part of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, I recruited the sampled population through professional networks where I posted a flyer, including the following virtual and in-person spaces:

- Facebook and LinkedIn
- State agencies that offer initiatives (e.g., independent living, job training, postsecondary education) specifically about individuals with historical experience in foster care.

## **Sample Size: Power Analysis**

Correlational research may have poor generalizability because it can only be applied to a narrow population (Campbell & Stanley, 1963/1966). However, I used

software to compute an a priori power analysis to detect the level of effectiveness of the predicted inferential statistics by using the  $F$  test, which reflects my hypotheses. All calculations were derived from the G\*Power Data Analysis (Version 3.1.9.7) to figure out the necessary sample size for this study and increase the validity of the correlational research. With the provision of parameters, the alpha level set is at 0.05, and the power level is chosen at .80. This yielded a direct medium effect size of 0.06269926 and a direct partial  $R^2$  of (0.059). After G\*Power calculations, I required a projected sample size of 128 foster care alumni males with depression to sample this study. This helped ensure I had enough power related to assumptions. Table 1 presents information on the a priori power analysis of multivariate linear regression and the sample size needed to figure out the findings.

**Table 1**

*G\*Power: Multivariate Linear Regression, Fixed Model (F test,) a Priori Power Analysis*

Input/Output	Tails/Size	Statistic
Input	Tail(s)	One
	Effect size	0.05
	Power (1- $\beta$ err prob)	0.8
Output	Total sample size	128
	Actual power	210

## **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

### ***Procedures for Recruitment and Participation***

As the researcher, I adapted a secured online survey tool, Qualtrics software, for the survey implementation once I recruited research participants who met the selection

criteria. Using an added survey component, I developed a demographic survey where users accessing the survey will self-select meeting study criteria for participation. I offered the research participants a web link to a secured website that included informed consent prior to participant entry to the online survey and offered after the survey completion.

Furthermore, convenience and snowball sampling were used via online selection procedures to seek and recruit participants based on their availability and proximity. This study's recruitment involved three strategies that aligned with the informed consent process and explained the approaches for obtaining voluntarily interested research participants. Upon Walden University's IRB approval, I went through the following procedures step by step.

First, I posted on social media platforms. Using social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn), I first recruited and identified eligible potential research participants for inclusion to expand the targeted population of this Spearman correlational study. I ensured that this form of recruitment activity followed applicable federal and state laws (Gelinas et al., 2017). The recruitment process was active and passive online and offline (flyer postings, website links with permission from organizational gatekeeper, emails, and private [Facebook and LinkedIn groups]; see Gelinas et al., 2017).

Second, I obtained permission from private, nonprofit organizations, and social service agencies via in-person and mobile text. This request was based on my professional network and other public sources. I also abided by each organization/agency's requirements about authorization for all participating parties. I

texted my contacts in my professional network by asking for referral leads to foster care alumni males who fit the study criteria.

Third, I used the snowball sampling technique as a backup plan to help increase the response rate. With this technique, I anonymously included a statement about referrals at the end of the survey for participants to invite qualified referrals to consider participation in this Spearman correlational study. Additionally, while ensuring that each recruitment strategy was ethical. In this way, there was no room for any influential situational settings or any form of contact with prospective research participants who did not agree to partake in the research study. Additionally, I informed the research participants who refer interested qualified research participants to start contact with me, the researcher, for further information and questioning of any kind.

There was a \$10 Amazon E-Gift card offered as incentive for participation in this Spearman correlational study. I implemented strategies that emphasize more balanced information and non-misleading terminology to show any biases with this plan.

### ***Data Collection***

As the researcher, I used numerical instruments, the MHSIS, EHS-14, and Depression Sensitivity Index (DSI), as one online survey with interval/ratio questions to collect the data. This method helped translated the respondent's feedback into a descriptive statistical analysis through pictorial displays to examine patterns, themes, and relationships from the data obtained relating to the study variables. After completing the survey, by clicking done, the research participants are thanked for taking the time out to complete the survey (see Appendix C for data collection email process).

## **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

The published instruments used in this study were essential in completing the recruitment and data collection process. In addition, testing both variables based on the theories, SCCT and TPB, was essential in measuring the constructs accurately with the following scales.

### ***Instrumentation***

**MHSIS.** The MHSIS was administered electronically via the internet. The MHSIS questionnaire was published in 2018 by developers Hammer and Spiker (2018; see permission email in Appendix F). The MHSIS is an instrument that research participants (foster care alumni males with depression) filled out online. The MHSIS has three items to measure that include the respondents' intentions to seek help from mental/behavioral health professionals, which supports the appropriateness of this Spearman correlational study (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). Additionally, the critical term "intention" suffices the appropriateness of this study as was mainly used within a part of this study's theoretical framework, the TPB. The MHSIS responses were measured on a Likert scale ranging from *extremely unlikely* (1) to *extremely likely* (7), *definitely false* (1) to *definitely true* (7), and *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7; Hammer & Spiker, 2018).

The reliability of the MHSIS showed internal consistency in an ethnically diverse study sample of U.S. adult women and men who self-identified with a mental health concern (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). Most of the sample included White women who sought help in the past and who would not in the future (Hammer & Spiker, 2018).

Additionally, the mental health concerns (academic, interpersonal, psychological, and drug abuse) with factor determinacy of .97 and an H index of .94 exceeded the smallest cutoffs proposed (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). In terms of validity, the MHSIS showed an exact classification rate close to 70% as a unidimensional model that produces standardized factor loadings (.92, (.15), .91) and residual variances (.92 and (.16; Hammer & Spiker, 2018). Thus, Hammer and Spiker (2018) showed that the variances (85%, 83%, and .84%) of the MHSIS three items may provide an exact dataset.

**EHS-14.** The EHS-14 is a 14-item scale with a four-factor model that focuses on psychological empowerment, self-motivation for the future, use of skills and resources, and goal orientation (Hong et al., 2014). EHS ranges from 0 to 10, where the score 0 indicates *strongly disagree* and 10 indicates *strongly agree* (Hong et al., 2014). The EHS-14 was published in 2014 by Phillip Young P. Hong, Sangmi Choi, and Joshua R. Polanin (Hong et al., 2014; Hong et al., 2016; see permission email in Appendix E). However, EHS-14 appropriateness to this Spearman correlational study is that it focuses on psychological self-sufficiency which may captivate the process of hope for foster care alumni with depression (Hong et al., 2020).

In Hong et al.'s (2020) study, a sample of vulnerable youth from low-income families in a Summer Youth Employment Program proved a solid convergent validity of robust evidence for the EHS-14. The evidence of EHS-14 included a statistically significant correlation with self-efficacy ( $r > .448, p < .01$ ), child hope ( $r > .467, p < .01$ ), and ESS ( $r > .165, p < .01$ ), while the discriminant validity included nonsignificant correlations between the subscales and gender of the youth (Hong et al., 2020). Also,



validity evidence of high scores of EHS-14 among the known groups who completed the study compared to the group who incomplete the study was tested and confirmed (Hong et al., 2020). In terms of reliability, the data findings emphasize the EHS-14 application's ability to effectively measure youth employment during their job training engagement or learning (Hong et al., 2020).

**DSI.** The DSI 9-item scale was used to find the effect of the research participants' intentions to seek mental help and increase the study's strength (Capron et al., 2021). Figuring out if the foster care alumni males have depression is challenging; the DSI was used as an added measurement. The DSI is a 5-point Likert scale acknowledged as an inventory/questionnaire published in 2021 by researchers Daniel W. Capron, Nicholas P. Allan, and Norman B. Schmidt. The scale ranges from (1) *very little* to (5) *very much* to indicate the research participants' level of agreement (Capron et al., 2021). Unlike the MHSIS and the EHS instruments, DSI does not require permission from the publisher unless it is not used for educational purposes and noncommercial research in a study (Capron et al., 2021). Capron et al. (2021) focused on two low-ordered factors (physical and cognitive of depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors and social concerns of social anxiety) to discover depression sensitivities. The depression sensitivities that show a connection based on the novel approach DSI was discovered, which increases its validity (Capron et al., 2021). In addition, Capron et al.'s study consisted of three independent samples, including a vast percentage of 64.1% non-Hispanic Whites. The rest of the participants involved 18.2% of Asians, 7.7% Hispanic White, 7% Black, 1.6% multiracial, and 1.4% American Indian in the first study. The first study percentages

generally resulted in incremental associations with depression sensitivity, physical and cognitive concerns (DSPCC) and depression sensitivities social concerns (DSSC) (Capron et al., 2021). DSPCC comprises six items and DSSC with three items on the DSI with 57% male and 43% female respondents (Capron et al., 2021). The rate on the DSI wherein respondents with high school diplomas rate at 12.3%, 24.4% with some college, and 42.1% of them leading with a bachelor's degree (Capron et al., 2021). These percentages appear to show attributes of homogeneity, which may indicate the high reliability of DSI. The second study results showed capturing accurate information with the correlation of DSPCC and DSSC at .71 ( $p < .001$ ) along with the DSI scale items built on a respective factor (.47-.90 on DSPCC and .61-.89 on DSSC). DSI is proper for this study because it will help describe the research participants' experiences and feelings and be an essential intervention target (Capron et al., 2021). In this way, DSI provides further support for building the measure, exposes the psychological and psychosocial factors that may be relevant to their depression, and strengthens the study (Capron et al., 2021).

### *Operationalization of Variables*

**Independent Variable.** The independent variable is mental help-seeking, and it was measured using the MHSIS-3-Item Scale by ordinally ranking the concepts that made up mental help-seeking. Mental help-seeking is operationally defined as the level of intention to seek psychological assistance from a mental health professional about mental health concerns (personal difficulties) and mental illnesses (depression). The variable/scale score is calculated by adding all three items and dividing them by 3, with

the mean score ranging between 1 at a minimum and 7 at a maximum (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). An example on scale MHSIS item one is “If I had a mental health concern, I would intend to seek help from a mental health professional,” *extremely unlikely* (1) to *extremely likely* (7; Hammer & Spiker, 2018).

**Dependent Variable.** The dependent variable is employment hope, and it was measured using the EHS-14 scale by ordinal ranking factors that make up employment hope. Employment hope is defined as a coping strategy that is understandable and measurable to monitor and assess a person’s state of psychological empowerment, futuristic self-motivation, use of skills and resources, and goal-orientated pathways as a developing means for self-sufficiency (Hong et al., 2014). The variable/scale score is calculated by assimilating. For example, one of the EHS-14 scale item 11 is “I am going to be working in a career job” (Hong et al., 2014).

**Covariate Variable.** The covariate variable was depression, and it was measured using the DSI 9-Item Scale that includes mental health concerns that may connect to the responses of the MHSIS. Depression is defined as a mental health concern that interferes with the psychological function and control of affectional bonds characterized by adverse effects on mood, actions, and cognitive functioning (LeMoult & Gotlib, 2019). The DSI items is decided by the statistical calculation of the total mean score ranging from (1) very little to (5) very much. For instance, the DSI item five, “If I feel exhausted for no reason, I worry that I may fall into depression,” is stated on the DSI ranging from (1) very little to (5) very much (Capron et al., 2021). Using this Likert Scale helps increase the validity of the data.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis of this study was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 28) by using the Spearman rank correlation statistical test to examine the research question and test the hypotheses. SPSS was not used with a multivariate linear regression model (MLRM) as a statistical technique as initially planned. Although, the MLRM was a statistical technique that could describe the relationship between the outcome variable (mental help-seeking) (Jhangiani et al., 2019b). As well as, the scores that can be used as an additive combination of the predictor variables in the EHS-14 instrument was not due to nonmonotonicity between the variables (Jhangiani et al., 2019b). A Spearman correlation test is the most appropriate nonparametric statistical measure considering its purpose of research to assess how well the relationship between two or more variables, like mental help-seeking and employment hope, can be described using a monotonic function (Laerd Statistics, n.d.; Spearman, 2010). It was used to summarize the strength and direction of the covarying relationship between mental help-seeking and employment hope in this study (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). The Spearman statistical correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) described integers ranging from (-1) a negative relationship and a (+1) positive relationship where the results was interpreted on an ordinal scale (Laerd Statistics, n.d.; Spearman, 2010). Moreover, a scatterplot was used to check for monotonicity.

Spearman rank correlation assumed that the data must be at least ordinal. The scores on the variables was assessed by ensuring one variable was monotonically related to the other variable (Laerd Statistics, n.d.; Spearman, 2010). Data screening was done in

SPSS by analyzing the datasets. The analysis was done through descriptive statistics to explore and assess the data files' accuracy, verify how much missing data the ordinal variables have, and look for test issues about normality (Laerd Statistics, n.d.; Papageorgiou et al., 2018; Spearman, 2010). Considering missing values, I excluded each missing response by omitting the participant response (Papageorgiou et al., 2018).

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

RQ: Is there a positive association between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among foster care males with depression?

$H_0$ : There is no statistically significant positive association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant positive association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.

### **Threats to Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

This Spearman correlational study was derived from primary data sources, including the instruments (DSI, EHS-14, and MHSIS). Some elements in research give rise to errors such as unpredictability and inconsistency. These errors can comprise the measurement reliability. For example, the reliability concepts applied to the instruments (DSI, EHS-14, and MHSIS) can be threatened if internal or external consistency is not acquired (Andrade, 2018).

### **Internal and External Validity**

Internal validity focuses on core factors, including how the study is designed, conducted, and analyzed based on if the results represent the truth (Andrade, 2018). A threat to internal validity within this correlational design may be the selection of the research participants based on their characteristics and Likert scale scores related to statistical regression (Flannelly et al., 2018; Frey, 2018). An added threat to internal validity could be instrumentation regarding changes in the measurement instruments (DSI, EHS-14, and MHSIS) and the outcomes.

A threat to external validity that investigates if findings can be generalized to other factors may be the interaction of selection effects and the experimental variables (Andrade, 2018; Flannelly et al., 2018). A threat to construct validity may fall under the restricted generalizability across the constructs. In correlational research, it is indicated that researchers cannot conclude causal relationships among the measured variables nor look at the effect of other variables outside of the two variables being explored (Campbell & Stanley, 1963/1966).

### **Ethical Procedures**

To understand the significance of the variables among the sampled population, I selected the participants based on their shared characteristics. I administered ethical and procedural documents specific to the nature of online sampling. In this way, I keep in mind quantitative digital communication methods to help maintain extensive sampling following internet and traditional recruitment sources. Therefore, the research of this

study was about the ethics towards human participants based on the integrity of the research documentation and the management of the data gathered.

After assessing and receiving approval from Walden University's IRB, I continued the data collection process while taking precautionary measures. Before data collection, I embedded an informed consent form in the survey based on ethical guidelines, including respect, beneficence, and justice. Considering guidelines, I ensured the form addressed the purpose of the research, the benefits, the participant's rights to withdraw at any time during the study, the respect for the participant's anonymity, and the participant's privacy protection. For privacy, my dissertation committee, the Walden University IRB, and I (the researcher) only had access to the data to ensure it was confidentially managed. Also, I abided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines about COVID-19 safety protocols when restrictions are lifted to avoid any harm or risks for necessary in-person recruitment (Walden University, n.d.). As a source of protection for the research participants, I included mental health support helplines' contact information to aid in case of any ruminating experiences of adverse effects. I also confirmed permission from the research participants to share their contact information with my dissertation committee as it pertains to the Walden IRB Application "A." To protect confidential data, I used the Qualtrics Survey and SPSS software to store and disseminate personal data and data findings securely. All measurement materials and general demographic data was kept for 5 years in a secured zip file during the entire data collection process and a hosted secure website created by me that was destroyed after 5

years. Overall, an extensive debriefing was conducted at the end of the data collection process as a follow-up by posting a one-page executive summary report of the results.

### **Summary and Transition**

Chapter 3 included a general review of this Spearman correlational study. The sections pertained to the correlational research design and its rationale, the quantitative method, the MHSIS, EHS, DSI measurement instruments, operationalization of the variables, and the ethical procedures. In addition, all these elements were used to examine the relationships between the variables (independent, dependent, and predictor), the hypothesis, and the research question from statistical tests to techniques. The following chapter interpreted the results from the data collected and explained the analyses.



## Chapter 4: Results

This Spearman correlational study aimed to determine the association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among depressed Black male foster care alums who met the inclusionary criteria. This research findings explore the experiences and concerns/intentions of the foster care alums depressed males.

The research consists of two hypotheses based on a one-tailed direction associated with the research question, “Is there a positive association between employment hope and seeking access to mental health-related services among foster care alumni males with depression?”

- $H_0$ : There is no statistically significant association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.
- $H_a$ : There is a statistically significant association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among foster care alumni with depression.

### **Data Collection**

The Walden University IRB approved study on August 4, 2022, with approval number 08-05-22-0758406, to begin conducting this dissertation’s recruitment and data collection process. For the recruitment process, the inclusion criteria for eligibility required that respondents be male-gendered, between ages 18 to 26, formerly in foster care, residing in states in the Southeastern United States, and identified with depression or symptoms of depression. I sought fidelity in recruitment to avoid skewed data findings with the measurement instruments used in this Spearman correlational study.

The recruitment and data collection process took approximately 2 months and 1 week, from August 8, 2022, to October 21, 2022. The outline below chronologically explains the process.

1. **August 8–15, 2022:** During the building and completion of the survey in the Qualtrics Software, I embedded the informed consent form in the online survey. The survey contained important research ethical information that required the respondents to thoroughly read the informed consent form entirely before continuing to the actual survey content.
2. **August 17, 2022:** I initially posted the recruitment flyer in a private Facebook group for public view/sharing among other social networks. I reposted the recruitment material again on August 28, 2022.
3. **August 26, 2022:** The survey link was initially coming up as an unavailable error at the beginning of the data collection process. However, I contacted the Qualtrics software customer service line and got the issue resolved.
4. **August 26–September 14, 2022:** Afterward, 2 weeks into the process and after resolving the issues with the link, the survey responses were very few but gradually increased over time from mid-September to October 21, 2022.

The data collection and recruitment process also occurred online on social media platforms, including Facebook and LinkedIn, and via professional social networks. Recruitment flyers were also posted on bulletin boards at local governmental entities with the permission of the organization's gatekeeper. Additionally, the anonymous online survey provides an improved method for the measurement of this study. A response rate

of 184 was achieved by the research respondents who started the survey considering the targeted population of 1,000. Overall, the survey respondents represented a sample size of 177 participants, 100% of whom completed the survey. This chapter explains the Spearman correlational study results from the data analysis.

### **Results**

Furthermore, the result within this chapter describes numerical data based on the one-tailed direction of the Spearman correlation test. The convenience sampling method and snowball sampling rendered 184 online survey respondents. Out of 184 respondents, only five did not complete the online survey, two respondents completed 13%, and the other three completed 62% more than the one respondent. After data cleaning was done on November 14, 2022, to exclude the respondents who attempted but did not complete the survey, 177 participants remained for data analysis.

The survey questions were divided into distinct factors, including employment hope, experiences, and concerns/intentions based on the DSI, EHS-14, and MHSIS Likert scales. After completing the questionnaire, survey respondents or research participants could accept or decline a \$10 Amazon gift card as a thank-you for completing the survey. I exported the data from Qualtrics Software using a SPV output file to interpret the data findings. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the results via bivariate correlation analysis.

The sample size included 177 participants after omitting the missing data. The Spearman Rho statistical analysis results characterize correlations and illustrate scatterplots with mental help-seeking and employment hope. The lower/higher Spearman Rho rank indicates a non-monotonic relationship scatter, whereas there is no tendency to

decrease or increase. Figures 4 and 5 also demonstrate no tendency to change between the variables mental help-seeking ( $\rho < .105$ ) and employment hope ( $\rho < .105$ ) and the covariate variable depression sensitivity ( $\rho < .473$  (EH) and  $\rho < .434$  (MHSIS) indicating  $\rho$ -values close to zero. Therefore, a multivariate linear regression technique was not used because the variables were not linearly related to each other.

**Table 2**

*Spearman Rho Correlations of Depressed Foster Care Alum Males' Employment Hope and Mental Help-Seeking Intentions*

Measurement	Correlation coefficient	One-tailed level of significance ( $\rho$ )	<i>n</i>
<i>Spearman Rho</i>			
Employment Hope-14	1.000	.0	175
MHSIS (Concerns)	0.95	.105	177

*Note.* This table demonstrates the elements of Spearman's rho correlation table,  $\rho < .105$ , one-tailed for each variable. MHSIS = Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale.

**Table 3**

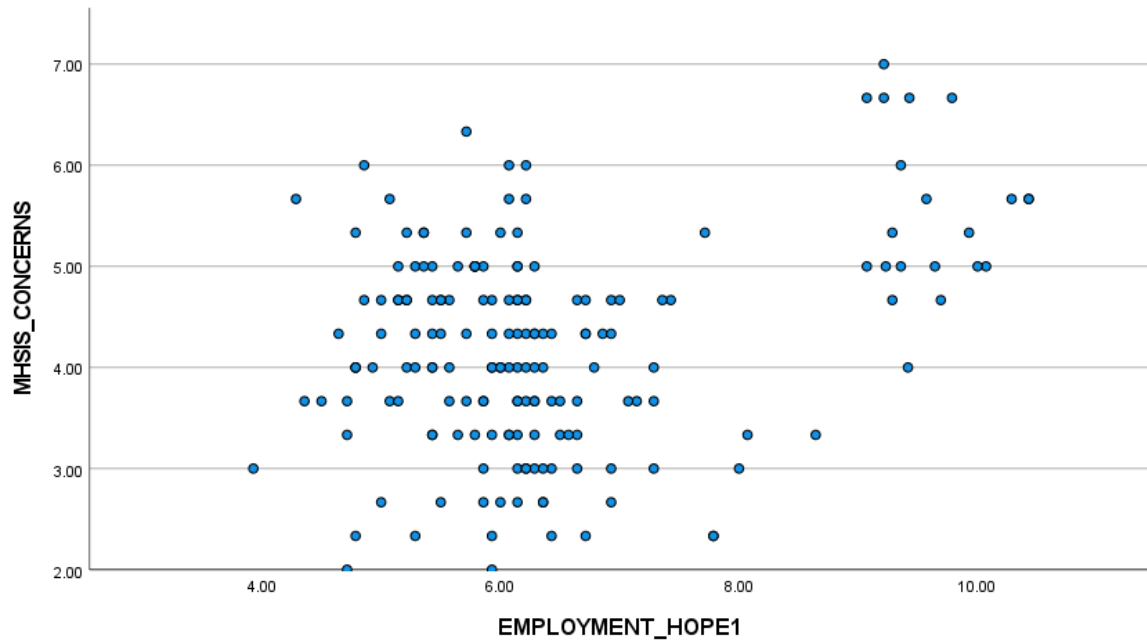
*Spearman Rho Correlations of the Primary Study Variables and the Covariate Variable (Depression) Impact Among Black Foster Care Alums Males*

Measurements	Correlation coefficient	One-tailed level of significance ( $\rho$ )	<i>n</i>
<i>Spearman Rho</i>			
Employment Hope-14	1.000	.0	175
MHSIS (Concerns)	.095	.105	175
DSI (Experiences)	.005	.473	174

*Note.* None of the modeled Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were significant to model the relationships in the studied population. MHSIS = Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale; DSI = Depression Sensitivity Index.

**Figure 3**

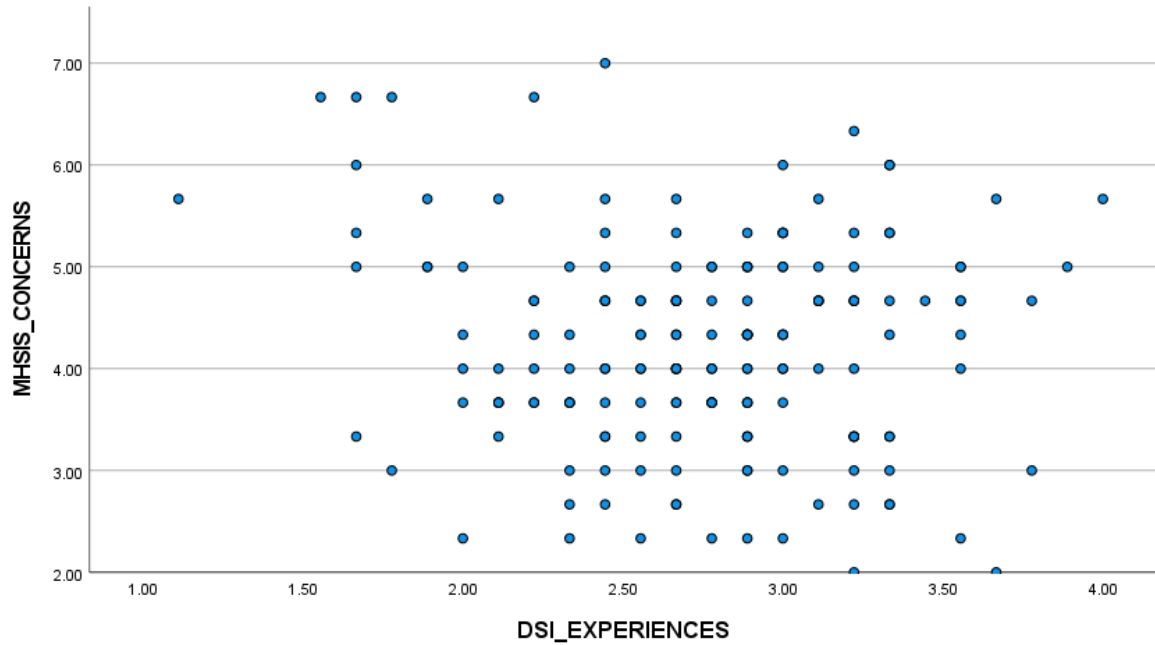
*Scatter Plot of MHSIS\_CONCERNS by EMPLOYMENT\_HOPE1*



*Note.* Each dot represents a foster care alum. Scores for mental help-seeking pattern intentions were obtained in a bivariate model in which the sampled self-reported intentions were the predictor of the sampled perceptions.

**Figure 4**

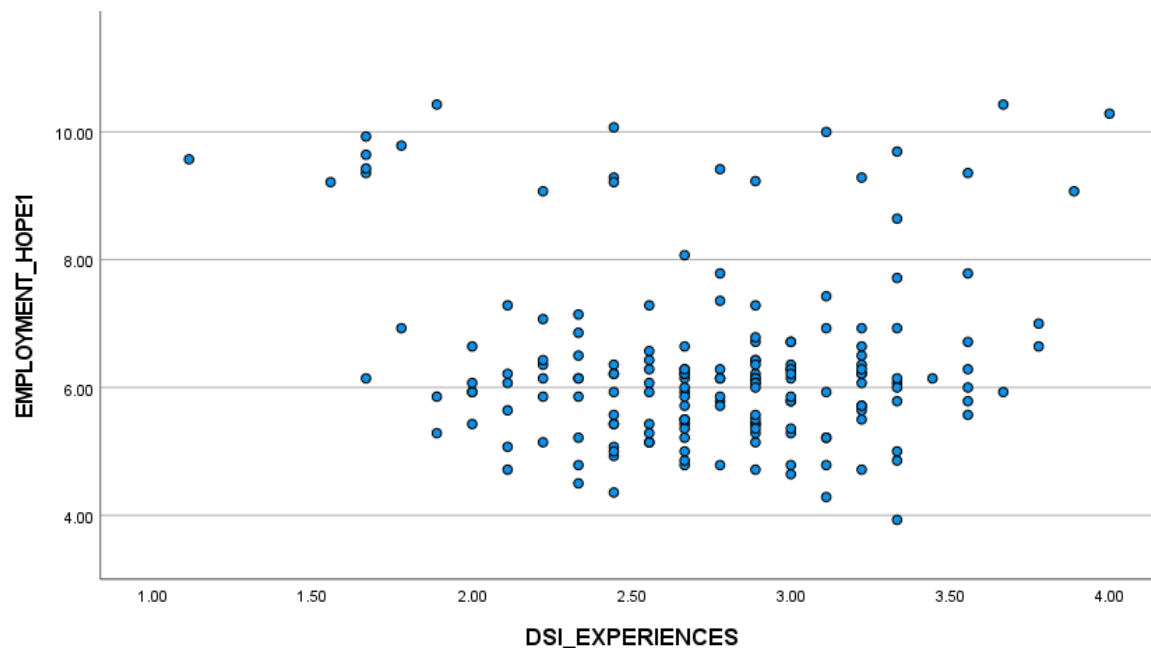
*Scatter Plot of MHSIS\_CONCERNS by DSI\_EXPERIENCES*



*Note.* Each dot shown represents low and high scores for DSI Likert Scale compared to the MHSIS Likert Scale among the studied sample self-report.

**Figure 5**

*Scatter Plot of EMPLOYMENT\_HOPE1 by DSI\_EXPERIENCES*



*Note.* Each dot represents scores from survey respondents self-report for DSI Likert Scale compared to the Employment Hope-14 Likert Scale.

### **Summary**

The sample consisted of 177 anonymous online survey respondents who self-administered their concerns/intentions and experiences with employment hope, mental help-seeking, and depression. The participants voluntarily participated in this recruitment and research process by completing the anonymous online survey after agreeing to informed consent via the survey link on social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn).

In data analysis, the findings based on the variables (employment hope, mental help-seeking) and the covariate variable (depression) revealed no tendency to change or no significance. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the data findings in-depth accumulation of

the associations within the literature. Furthermore, recommendations are made supporting implications for social change that provide insight for additional research studies.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this Spearman correlational study, I explored the association between mental help-seeking and employment hope among depressed Black male foster care alum. Over 170 respondents initiated the anonymous online survey in which the minimum sample size needed to be at least 128. The central focus of this Spearman correlational study was determining whether there was a positive association between employment hope and mental help-seeking. The data findings indicated that the studied variables within the research question were not significant.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Reviewing the literature of this Spearman correlational study helped identify multiple studies that addressed concerns, intentions, and challenges of emancipation among foster care alums (Hernandez & Lee, 2020; Pryce et al., 2017; Villagrana et al., 2018; Villagrana et al., 2020). However, few have focused on the impact of depression on employment hope and mental help-seeking among foster care alums (Plowden et al., 2016; Pryce et al., 2017).

The current study revealed variable views based on Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly and very likely to not very likely. The results of the data and variable view illustrated the behavioral beliefs of the sample population as it relates to their negative experiences and perceptions as well as their decision-making. However, the findings showed no monotonic relationship between employment hope and mental help-seeking nor the predicted variable, depression. Furthermore, this leads to speculation for other variables to understand the dynamics deeply.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A few limitations exist within this Spearman correlational study. The data findings were not linear for this study which were independent of each other as it relates to correlational research (Spearman, 2010). Therefore, no multivariate linear regression could be conducted among the covariate variable, depression, because determining the flow of the variables was not possible (Spearman, 2010). Regarding generalizability, the results of the data collected do not provide evidence of a causal link to the targeted population or allow the findings to include causal relationships between employment hope and mental help-seeking. Thus, appropriate developing policies and interventions are complex, whereas cultural and geographical differences exist among foster care alums in the Southeastern United States (Campbell & Stanley, 1963/1966; Linton, 2020).

### **Recommendations**

The survey responses reflect recommendations for future behavioral health professionals' cultural competency, collaboration enrichment, and consensus building. An amendment to independent living programs across the United States for new innovative, accessible technology initiatives should be developed to determine how to best target the foster care alum community. Utilizing available and practical resources and newly implemented ones should be used as intervention strategies for planning processes to help resolve issues surrounding prevention/intervention programs for vulnerable populations. Developing problem-solving models for direct practice is essential for behavioral health professionals and social workers. Also, having evaluation methods like measurement-based care (MBC) to measure and document what

interventions and transitional plans are working and the ones that are not are pertinent (Harvey, 2022). This method is pertinent for flexibility, modifying plans, increasing client engagement (e.g., foster care alums), and informing effective behavioral health practice (Harvey, 2022). Individuals within the foster care community may know their issues more than others (Villagrana & Lee, 2020). As well as the intricate parts of the foster care system that impact their emotional well-being, they may also know potential solutions to resolve their issues (Villagrana & Lee, 2020).

Therefore, behavioral health professionals, social workers, and other frontline professionals remain open to new information and continued education training to enhance interpersonal helping skills facilitate a process. The process of facilitating simplifies how behavioral health providers interpret symptom presentation and emergent situations (Merino et al., 2018). The sample population's study results concerning intentions and experiences with mental help-seeking and employment hope emphasize the speculation and need for future studies focused on different issues. Lastly, this Spearman correlational study's findings can be utilized in the instrumentation and operationalization of constructs that explore mental health-related service systems, assimilating culture norms, self-care, and independent living skills.

### **Implications: Positive Social Change**

With social change, a ripple effect of action and impact comes in diverse ways to shape the lives of others. The implications for positive social change with behavioral health and social work professionals and court personnel within this study may include the culture around preliminary planning with multidisciplinary teams. Practical

multidisciplinary evaluation may include stepwise evidence-based guidelines with sustainable action plans to work efficiently within the mental health system for life after foster care. Hence, adhering to evidence-based guidelines affects field practice, which may help providers practice techniques and strategies more competently, ethically, and knowledgeably, which may heighten organizations' efficiency, thereby yielding a better client "practitioner" satisfaction. Following evidence-based guidelines may increase after-care support with improved preliminary planning, which may positively motivate foster alums' future expectations for the shift to living in society.

Conversely, the findings of the variables studied were different from the original hypothesis. The results were nonsignificant, which indicates that behavioral health professionals and other frontline professionals should not expect an association between the questioned variables (employment hope and mental help-seeking). Though the findings were insignificant, the results show an impact among the variables and the demographics of the studied vulnerable population. To shed lighter on this Spearman correlational research study, researchers should look at a diverse set of variables beyond the foster care system without re-examination of the findings. For instance, the scatter plot shown in Figure 5 could be used to make more predictions for further analysis and/or Spearman Rho testing. More predictions can be made by focusing on a larger sample that provides further insight surrounding relationship bases among the current studied population and other quantitative research methods like causal comparative and descriptive. Central research questions could include the following:

- How much continued education training for crisis intervention do professionals in the mental health service field participate in per quarter?
- What is the difference between self-stigma and public stigma in usage of mental health service among unemployed foster alums and employed foster alums?
- Is there a significant positive correlation between practices of cultural competence and the level of trust satisfaction of behavioral health practitioners among foster care alumni?
- What is the difference between the usage of mental health related services between female and male foster care alums?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation between the types of cultural norms and the employment hope perceptions carried out by depressed male foster care alums?

With increased organizational efficiency, implementing multiple policies about vulnerable populations can be effective in outreach and long-term outcomes locally, nationally, and statewide. Organizational effectiveness may also give providers/workers a chance to participate in a movement for positive social change that could strengthen or ignite an encouragement-based practice. In this way, providers involved in more participatory work structures may influence foster alums' security about independent living, which may help prevent their increased emotions of insecurity and frustration. On the other hand, experiences of formal and informal support after care may challenge limited awareness for foster alums. Foster alums may need clarification with creating a

social network with relatives, friends, governmental/non-governmental stakeholders, and life coaches to obtain financial support, job skills, housing security, academics, and personal growth. All these things may seem difficult to navigate through a world of ruminating thoughts from past traumatic experiences; however, healthy decision-making, study, and life skills are resources that encourage resilience and self-empowerment.

### **Conclusions**

This Spearman correlational study's centralization focused on expanding the current literature about employment hope and mental help-seeking among depressed foster care alums Black males. The application of the SCCT and TPB allowed for survey responses self-administered by the studied population. No significant correlation emerged from the data analysis as predicted. This result indicates suggestions for additional variables to be examined regarding the barriers faced by foster care alums. Men have more challenges processing their emotions rather than overlooking or showing them to others. These individuals may find difficulty in overcoming stereotypes they were exposed to in their childhood or within the foster care community. It can be challenging when an individual feels like they must work. After getting out of the foster care system, compassion may be hard to give after being part of a system that may lack the influence of modeling how to have emotional intelligence. Being fully connected with their mental fortitude could help strengthen the emotional areas where they might feel weakened. It may look like replacing their negative reasoning with hopeful reasoning.

The necessity to adhere to cultural competency in the behavioral health profession may be essential to the mental health-related services received by foster care alums from

the provision of therapists and/or counselors. Understanding the effect of depression may encourage more interventions and prevention programs that promote positive social change and resilience among behavioral health professionals. Such programs may reduce levels of reluctance, expanding the mental well-being presented to clients to lead to a prosperous future.

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## Appendix A: Acts of Legislation Purposes and Contributions Table Figure

<b>Governing Legislative Acts</b>	<b>Founded/Amended</b>	<b>Purpose/Contribution</b>
<b>Title-IV-E Independent Living Initiative</b>	1986	To provide services for the child to achieve independence who would ultimately be emancipated from foster care system (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Jones,2014). This governing has been used to foster research evidence-based practice and service delivery system (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). To change funding systems scope to encourage less dependence on home placements and urgency on permanency transitional planning system (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).
<b>Foster Care Independence Act</b>	1999	To strengthen the foster care system to help youth struggling to make a stable transition to adulthood after aging out of care (Social Security, n.d.). However, life challenges have presented a lack of faith in the provisional services for youth social support in the state and local sectors (Social Security, n.d.). Given this governing act, the FCIA double up financing in the United States to broaden services to all qualified older youth (Social Security, n.d.). Strategically implemented independent living programs to assist youth in their self-sufficiency preparation after being emancipated from the state of care (Social Security, n.d.).
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Founded/Amended</b>	<b>Purpose/Contribution</b>
<b>John H. Chaffee Independence Program</b>	1999- amended five times to include the Chaffee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program (Congressional Research Service, 2019).	To increase funding for independent living activities, emotional support, housing, money management, and emphasizing state accountability outcomes for foster care alumni (Congressional Research Service, 2019). It is also purposed for providing funds to states, territories, Indian tribal entities (states) with information and additional aids for present and foster care alumni (Congressional Research Service, 2019).

## Appendix B: Surveys

**Depression Sensitivity Index (DSI)**

INSTRUCTIONS: Circle the **one phrase** that best represents the extent to which you agree with the item. If any of the item's *concern something* that is not a part of your experience, answer on the bases of how you think you might feel *if you had* such an experience. Otherwise, answer all items based on your own experiences.

1. If I get an occasional thought of hurting myself, I worry I might act on it.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

2. When something doesn't go my way, I worry I'm going to lose hope.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

3. If I have a bad day, I get scared that things aren't going to ever get better.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

4. It scares me when I feel like I'm about to have less energy.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

5. If I feel exhausted for no reason, I worry that I'm about to sink into depression.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

6. If I can't sleep, I worry that there is something wrong with me.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

7. It is important to me to not appear depressed.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

8. When I cry in the presence of others, I fear what people might think

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

9. It would be horrible for me to cry in public.

VERY LITTLE    A LITTLE    SOME    MUCH    VERY MUCH

### Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale (MHSIS)

INSTRUCTIONS: For the purposes of this survey, “mental health professionals” include psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, and counselors. Likewise, “mental health concerns” include issues ranging from personal difficulties (e.g., loss of a loved one) to mental illness (e.g., anxiety, depression). Please mark the box that best represents your opinion.

If I had a mental health concern, I would intend to seek help from a mental health professional.

1 (Extremely unlikely)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Extremely likely)
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If I had a mental health concern, I would try to seek help from a mental health professional.

1 (Definitely false)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Definitely true)
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If I had a mental health concern, I would plan to seek help from a mental health professional.

1 (Strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Strongly agree)
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**Short Employment Hope Scale-14 (EHS-14)**Items

3. When working or looking for a job, I am respectful toward who I am.
4. I am worthy of working in a good job.
5. I am capable of working in a good job.
6. I have the strength to overcome any obstacles when it comes to working.
11. I am going to be working in a career job.
15. I feel energized when I think about future achievement with my job.
17. I am aware of what my skills are to be employed in a good job.
18. I am aware of way my resources are to be employed in a good job.
19. I am able to utilize my skills to move towards career goals.
20. I am able to utilize my resources to move toward career goals.
21. I am on the road toward my career goals.
22. I am in the process of moving forward toward reaching my goals.
23. Even if I am not able to achieve my financial goals right away, I find a way to get there.
24. My current path will take me to where I need to be in my career.

## Appendix C: Data Collection Email Process

<b>Data Collection Process Timeline Start/Finish</b>	
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Date</b>
Building and completion of survey	<b>August 8<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Initial recruitment flyer posting on social media (Facebook private group)	<b>August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Had trouble with survey link working properly. Contacted Qualtrics Software customer service line to resolve issue	<b>August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Recruitment flyer reposted in Facebook private group	<b>August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>
Survey responses gradually increased from very little	<b>August 26<sup>th</sup>- September 14, 2022</b>
Responses rate picked up	<b>September 14<sup>th</sup> – October 21<sup>st</sup>,2022</b>
Response Rate Met	<b>October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022</b>

## Appendix D: Email Confirmations from Permission of Instruments Developers

Joseph H. Hammer <joe.hammer@uky.edu>  
Fri 7/2/2021 2:13 PM  
To: Vanessa Jennings

Yes, that's fine. Please also complete the permission form at the link below. Good luck!

- Joe H.

Hello,

Thanks for your interest in my instruments. **To obtain permission to use them, please visit the appropriate webpage listed below.** The webpage has a link to the Hammer Instrument Permission Form towards the bottom of the webpage. The bottom of each webpage also has a downloadable copy of the instrument.

**MHSAS:**

<http://drjosephhammer.com/research/mental-help-seeking-attitudes-scale-mhsas/>

**MHSIS:**

<http://drjosephhammer.com/research/mental-help-seeking-intention-scale-mhsis/>

**HSSS:**

<http://drjosephhammer.com/research/help-seeker-stereotype-scale-hsss/>

**ISMI-9**

You do not need permission to use the ISMI-9.

Thank you,

- Joe H.



On Fri, Jul 2, 2021, at 3:58 PM Vanessa Jennings <[vanessa.jennings2@waldenu.edu](mailto:vanessa.jennings2@waldenu.edu)> wrote:

Dear Dr. Joseph Hammer,

I am a doctoral student from Walden University writing my dissertation titled '*Help-Seeking Behaviors and Employment Hope among Depressed Black Male Foster Care Alumni*', under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Randy Heinrich, who can be reached at (903)881-5581 and/or via email ([randy.heinrich@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:randy.heinrich@mail.waldenu.edu)). The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) can be contacted by email at [irb@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@mail.waldenu.edu).

I would like the permission to use the Mental Help-Seeking Intention Scale (MHSIS) questionnaire instrument in my Spearman correlational research study. I would like to use your Likert scale instrument to administer it online through a survey software and print hard copies of it to use in-person under the following conditions:

- I use the questionnaire solely for my entire research study and will not sell it for any form of compensation or use it in any curriculum developed activities.
- I also ensure I include the copyright statement on each version of the instrument.
- I send a copy of my completed research study to your attention upon completion of the study.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me through email at ([v.jennings2@waldenu.edu](mailto:v.jennings2@waldenu.edu)).

Sincerely,  
Vanessa R. Jennings  
Doctoral Student  
PhD in Human and Social Services

Hong, Philip Young <phong@luc.edu>

Mon 7/5/2021 8:32 PM

To: Vanessa Jennings

Dear Ms. Jennings,

Thank you very much for contacting me about the use of EHS-14 for your dissertation. You have my permission and full support to use it as part of your research.

Best regards,

Philip Hong



Philip Hong, PhD | Professor

Associate Dean for Research & Director of the Doctoral Program

Director, Center for Research on Self-Sufficiency (CROSS)

1 E. Pearson St. | Maguire Hall 514 | Chicago, IL 60611

312.915.7447 | [phong@luc.edu](mailto:phong@luc.edu) | [www.luc.edu/faculty/phong](http://www.luc.edu/faculty/phong)

312.915.7441 | [crosscenter@luc.edu](mailto:crosscenter@luc.edu) | [www.luc.edu/cross](http://www.luc.edu/cross)



Vanessa Jennings

Fri 7/2/2021 2:08 PM

To: phong@luc.edu

Dear Dr. Phillip Young P. Hong,

I am a doctoral student from Walden University writing my dissertation titled '*Help-Seeking Behaviors and Employment Hope among Depressed Black Male Foster Care Alumni*', under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Randy Heinrich, who can be reached at (903)881-5581 and/or via email

([randy.heinrich@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:randy.heinrich@mail.waldenu.edu)). The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) can be contacted by email at [irb@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@mail.waldenu.edu).

I would like the permission to use the Short Employment Hope Scale (EHS-14) instrument in my Spearman correlational research study. I would like to use your Likert scale instrument to administer it online through a survey software and print hard copies of it to use in-person under the following conditions:

- I use the Likert scale solely for my entire research study and will not sell it for any form of compensation or use it in any curriculum developed activities.
- I also ensure I include the copyright statement on each version of the instrument.
- I send a copy of my completed research study to your attention upon completion of the study.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me through email at ([v.jennings2@waldenu.edu](mailto:v.jennings2@waldenu.edu)).

Sincerely,

Vanessa R. Jennings

Doctoral Student

PhD in Human and Social Services