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The Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Young Adults Who Have Transitioned Out of State or Other Care

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Abstract

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by

Linda R. Barnes-Ross

MS, University of Texas at Austin, 1994

BS, Park University, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Human Services

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Abstract

Over 20,000 young adults are released from state care annually and 100,000 young adults are released from justice centers. Past studies have revealed that young adults 18-24 years of age transitioning out of care are not prepared for independent living and may face many adversities. The problem is that young adults have difficulties finding permanent housing once emancipated from state care, their biological homes, or juvenile justice centers. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of young adults 18-24 years of age and how their experiences and life skills helped on their journey to acquire permanent housing. The theoretical foundation was Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The research design was a purposive inductive design that used a generic qualitative inquiry tradition and semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were recruited via online postings and snowball sampling. I then used Microsoft word find to identify recurring or similarity of data. I also used the framework method analysis that employs a matrix to help organize and identify patterns, and similarities. Additionally, the data was narrowed down again and grouped in themes. Five main themes emerged: (a) living on a couch or in a car is not homelessness; (b) the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) is not used or understood but some services are used; (c) life skills, education, vocational training are lacking; (d) health, healthcare, and safety are not considerations; and (d) social and personal relationships lack maturity and development. Data also revealed important implications for practice and social change. The themes that were focused on included young adults' observations, perceptions, and experiences in moving without and within state programs and their success and failures.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Anthony Ross Sr., who has been there for me as my rock, and stronghold, providing great feedback, support, and encouragement. I also dedicate this project to my two children Jessica Renee and my son Anthony Ross Jr., who also believed in me and my ability to succeed. I want to dedicate this project to my mother, Verdell for her encouragement and belief in my ability, and all my sisters and brothers for their support as well.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

Researchers have found that one of the biggest challenges for young adults 18 to 24 years of age who are leaving state care is finding a home (Dion, Dworsky, Krauff, & Kleinman, (2014); Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2018) revealed that in 2017, there were roughly 19,945 young adults who left foster care and faced the task of finding housing. However, housing instability or lack of a permanent home is not a dilemma that is faced only by young adults who leave the official care of the state; this is also a problem for those who exit criminal justice centers (Covenant House, 2018) and those who have left the home of their biological parents but may be counted among the nation's homeless populations (Department of Housing and Urban Development 2016). Studies conducted by Covenant House (2018) estimated that over 100,000 young adults exit state and county prison systems; however, they may return to unstable homes with family issues involving domestic violence, substance abuse, unresolved mental illness, and poverty. In addition, these same young adults may in some cases, return to the prison system.

Statement of the Problem

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH, 2017) reported that the HUD's Single Point in Time Homeless, on a single night in 2017, identified 41,000 individuals as unaccompanied youths (those without parents) in the homeless ranks in the United States. Of these 41,000 unaccompanied youths, approximately 88% (36,080) were between the ages of

18 to 24, and the remaining 12% (4,920) unaccompanied children were under the age of 18

years of age (NAEH, 2017). In addition to homelessness, there are many issues that young

adult homeless individuals face. Wiltz (2017) contended that homeless young adults have

become a challenging population to work with because they are difficult to track. Wiltz

termed this population the nation's invisible homeless population because they may use cars,

abandoned buildings, motels, and couches as a form of transitional housing.

Also included in this invisible homeless population are those individuals who are

living on the streets, or in hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds, emergency or transitional

shelters, and public or private areas not designed or regularly used as regular sleeping

accommodations for human beings (National Health Care for the Homeless Council,

2017). Young adults 18-24 years of age may also face many adversities such as (a) low

educational achievement, (b) unemployment and underemployment, (c) early parenting,

(d) substance abuse, (e) interactions with justice systems, (f) an inability to navigate the

housing market and, (g) the stigma of homelessness (Dion et al. 2014; Hudson & Karabi,

2012; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). Young adults are unprepared and lack the skills needed

for successful transition from state care and are at a high risk for adverse outcomes and

episodic homelessness during their transition (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences,

perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care,

incarceration, and homeless out-of-home care base in their search for stable or permanent

housing.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a generic qualitative approach. The generic qualitative approach investigates individuals reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences of the outer world (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015).). In this study, I explored the experiences of individuals 18-24 years of age who have transitioned from state care, the justice system, or those who are homeless. I explored participants transition from care, the life skills they used, and their experiences on their journey to acquire permanent housing. The approach fit the study in several ways: (a); the approach allows each participant to describe their personal journey, (b); the approach takes into consideration the theoretical framework that would identify holistic external factors, commonalities, and differences within the sample and, (c); the approach helps to reveal what each person experienced to reach the common goal of finding permanent housing.

Research Question

RQ: What are the experiences, perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care, incarceration, or a homeless out-of-home care base?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory as it considers the developing human and the surrounding influences that they may have encountered during their evolvement and growth as human beings. Bronfenbrenner presented a holistic approach to the world of research with the aim of expanding the researcher's conception of human development, and the resulting influences

that one experiences through social interactions, experiences, system exchanges and time.
Bronfenbrenner (1977), begins by introducing definitions on ecological theory, five-
subsystems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems), and nine corresponding
propositions. The nine propositions include:

1. Reciprocity.

2. All participant inclusion in setting.

3. Relationship types.

4. The physical environment.

5. Analysis of interactions between settings.

6. Sub-system and higher order effects across settings.

7. Ecological transitions in a person's life.

8. Immediate setting evaluation for informal and formal contexts.

9. Movement away from previous ideologies relating to goals, roles, activities, and
   interconnections (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Ecological theory was ideal for the study of young adults transitioning into the
adult world, as they work through various systems, and how it impacts their maturing
individual circumstances. I used ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in this study by
focusing on three major systems: the micro system, the mesosystem, and the
chronosystem, and five propositions selectively nested among each system. I used the
microsystem that covers Propositions 2 and 4. Proposition 2 considers the participation of
all, both participants and researcher in the study, while Proposition 4 states that ecological
experiments must take account of the physical environment and possible direct influences

on social process taking place within the study (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These are

important aspects of consideration, as I recruited individuals who are currently in a post

homeless life skills training program.

In addition, I used the macrosystem which consists of the overreaching effects of

the micro, meso and exo systems, and the culture or subculture that the individual

identifies with, and the chrono-system which includes customs, structures, opportunities,

and life course options over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).. This aspect was also important

as my goal was to interview a diverse participant pool of individuals who are foster care

alumni, post incarcerated, and generally homeless individuals.

Lastly, I used the chronosystem. This system deals with changes or consistencies

over time, and looks at the characteristics of the person and the overall environment

(Velez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina, & Coll, 2017). In

summary, I used the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the chronosystem, each system

representing the changing and developing human overtime, and reveals how they were

able to work within or without the social services needed to survive. Also, it helps to see

how maturation over time has helped participants refine choices that may have led the

individual to progress in life.

Definition of Terms

The following information provides a clear definition of terms:

Early parenting: Early parenting is defined as the incidence of young men and

women who become parents once they have transitioned out of care (Dion, et al, 2014).

Education: Education is defined as study curriculum designed for young adults in a learning environment.

Emancipated young adult: Emancipated young adult is defined as an individual who is 17 years of age, a resident of a state in which they have pursued emancipation status, living apart from their parent's, and able to support or manage their own affairs (Texas Legal Age Laws, 2018a). Additionally, an emancipated young adult is also a person who has emancipated or aged out of State care usually at the age of 18. (Texas Legal Age Laws, 2018b).

Homeless young adults: Homeless young adults is defined by HUD (2014) as individuals and families who live in a place not meant for human habitation (including the streets, or in their car), emergency shelters, transitional housing, and hotels paid for by governments or charitable organizations.

Lifestyle: Lifestyle is defined as how young adults adapt to certain lifestyles in order to maintain their independence.

Social stigmatization: Social stigmatization is defined as how society negatively views homeless individuals in general, and homeless young adults in particular.

Transience: Transience is defined as leaving home to become independent of parents, attending or completing college or vocational school, entering or leaving intimate relationships, and starting or ending a job.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

During the research process, I assumed that all factors included in the study would remain consistent and that all the respondents would gave honest and sincere answers. Time and place to meet, as well as the administration of the survey instrument were some of the factors that were controllable. However, it was up to the participants to provide honest and sincere feedback. Second, I assumed that the participants were able to articulate their experiences and identify what worked for them as well as what did not work, as they moved closer to stable or permanent housing. I assumed that participants articulated their experiences, and any concretely services they used.

I assumed that a timeframe of 4 years was appropriate to capture recent memories of individuals who have experienced transitional changes. Transitional changes can be in many forms to include physical and chronological maturation, movement from place to place and use of agency supports, directions and recommendations (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)). Forth, I assumed that there may have been adversities experienced by the participants, either by trial or error, agency system direction, timelines, or maturation, and that they would be able to discuss these adversities. I also assumed that results may not reflect the views of all young adults 18-24 years of age who have transitioned from care. There is the possibility that some participants in the study may have had an easier path toward finding stable or permanent housing.

Lastly, I watched for bias in my role as the researcher due to my past experience as a program director and child care administrator in a child group home setting. However, I

used bracketing to help with bias and prejudgments in this area (see more details in

Chapter 3).

Delimitations

The scope of this study was focused on the experiences of young adults 18-24

years of age who have transitioned out of state care, those that are post incarcerated or

homeless within the past 4 years, and their journey to acquire stable or permanent housing.

The delimitations of the study were as follows: (a) those relating to the small sample size

of participants, (b) the inability to generalize to a larger population within a qualitative

study orientation, and (c) the limited age range of 18-24 years of age.

Limitations

Limitations for the study fell in four domains: diversity of experiences, honesty,

time in transition, and the disclosure of negative information. First, the study of young

adults transitioning from care is filled with a diversity of challenges and not all can be

addressed in this study (Bender et al., 2016; Courtney et al., 2019). The study was limited

by the fact that there are multiple issues, concerns, problems, and experiences that each

person brings to the interview and not all of these items can be included. Second, the

study was also limited by the honesty and sincerity participants choose to present in

answering the interview protocol questions. Lastly, limitations may be encountered by

participants who may chose not to divulge their full backgrounds within the boundaries of

the study, such as drug abuse or drug related issues, health concerns, social stigmatization,

or other unfortunate experiences encountered along the way (Bender et al., 2016;

Courtney et al., 2019). This proved to be valued based on the response of one male who

noted that he "was sent to a boy's home after he violated his probation". However, this participant did not go any further into his past with legal problems.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that as more than 157,000 young adults are emancipated annually and released into society (AFCARS, 2016; Covenant House, 2018; NAEH, 2017) and they will compound an already highly vulnerable population. The lack of housing dilemma that confronts these young adults in search of stable or permanent housing may only worsen if state agencies and individuals do not have proper knowledge and skills to seek out and attain stable housing. In addition, by adding the current experiences of young adults in transition in three populations simultaneously to the body of knowledge, more awareness of their needs and differences can be addressed more effectively by policy makers and social services professionals.

Summary

Chapter 1 was an overview of the study and covered three major areas necessary to conduct a qualitative inquiry study: the problem, those that are affected, and the purpose and nature of the study. Second, Chapter 1 included the required essentials to develop a foundation on which to build a rational need for the study to take place. This included the research question, the theoretical framework and how it was used, as well as the gap in the literature. Lastly, additional study development essentials are covered to include the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 will cover the literature review process including research strategies, sources, past research findings and the theoretical framework. Additionally, Chapter 2 will

cover the outcomes and adversities borne by young adults in transition, the theoretical framework, types of housing assistance provided to young adults, and the challenges and barriers in accessing this assistance. Lastly, I will identify legislation and programs in support of young adults in transition.

In Chapter 3, I cover the research question, and research principles in four main areas:

- The foundation which includes topics such as the methodology, design, researcher's role, and procedures.

- The identification of the participants, the recruitment strategy and sample size needed, the interview protocol instrument to be used, interview scheduling, data collection, and coding.

- Procedures needed to ensure validation and integrity of information gathered to include information on credibility, transferability, dependability and triangulation.

- Review of the ethical procedures, treatment of human participants and data, as well as the data analysis process.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this study contain the findings and conclusions. In these last chapters, I review the data collection and analyses processes, the main themes that resulted from the coding and analysis, and the implications of the results. I also discuss the potential avenues for social change.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Young adults who leave state care are provided with many opportunities in preparation for discharge, to include classes in the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, experimental life skills training, youth development and training activities and many support services (Department of Family Protective Services, 2018). At face value, these young adults may appear to be ready for independent living; however, past research has shown that many of the 20,000 plus foster care alumni who are emancipated annually are not ready for independent living (Curry & Abrams, 2015). In addition, Curry and Abrams (2015) found that that foster care alumni who age out of care often experience a difficult transition to adulthood in several important domains including housing acquisition and homelessness.

Also, previous researchers have found that young adults who have left home or other-out-of-home placements, will experience a prolonged transition to adulthood (Dworsky, et al., 2012). In the past 3 decades, the process for young adults transitioning from home has changed drastically due to changes in the job market, the rise of educational options, and choice of when to leave parental care (Furstenberg, 2015). However, for young adults who do not have the choice to remain or return home, Chang et al. (2013) contended that homeless young adults appear to be at a greater risk for many adversities such as unemployment, poor educational pursuits, and substance abuse. Of the 100,000 young adults released from justice centers, their life too, is one that is fraught with many diversions. In a study by Covenant House (2018), it was revealed that of 100,000 young adults who left the justice system, roughly 80% will end up returning or

being put in adult prisons within 3 years. One of the things that all three of these groups of young adults have in common is that they all remain at risk for homelessness and the need for stable and permanent housing. My goal with this study is to fill a gap of providing data on all three populations simultaneously.

Literature Research Strategies

The identifying criteria for this literature review included several overlapping subject areas and fields of study. I used various databases and search engines to locate professional journals, edited books, and peer-reviewed sources to identify relevant scholarship. I searched the Walden University Library's databases, including Thoreau Search, EBSCO, SocINDEX, and PsychINFO. I also used Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, SAGE journals, Google Scholar, Mandalay, and Springer databases to find peer-reviewed articles. Additional research strategies used included identification of various government and local agency informational reports and statistics that would shed light on the extent of the problem at both federal and local levels

I identified statistical information from governmental and nonprofit agencies that provide services to my target population such as the Anne Casey Foundation, Lifeworks and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. To locate scholarly and peer-reviewed articles, I used combinations of the keywords and terms using Boolean identifiers to search databases. Keywords included *foster care, foster care youth, adolescent, emancipated young adults, young adult, aging out, housing, homelessness, transitional housing, housing types for transitioning youths, life skills training, mental health, substance abuse,* and *social justice*. Based on my search, this literature review will

cover themes I identified in the literature on homelessness and youth: (a) young adults in transition, (b) homelessness, (c) criminality, (d) social stigma, (e) lifestyles, (f) early parenting, (g) substance abuse, (h) employment, (i) education, (j) housing typologies and program options,(k) challenges to finding permanent housing to include access, barriers, and cost, and (l) a legislative review that provides support to youth in transition.

Theoretical Framework

Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model was chosen for this study. Bronfenbrenner was a Russian Psychologist who developed ecological theory on the study of human development. (Velez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarroondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina, Coll (2017). This theory is focused on the developing individual within the context of external experiences, and systems that the individual may encounter on their way to becoming self-sustaining and productive members of society. Ecological theory has two proposition and five subsystems. The first proposition is that the individual is continually developing, and the second proposition is that people, processes and programs in their close environment are repeatedly affecting their growth and direction (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The five subsystems include (a) microsystem, (b) meso-system, (c) exo-system, (d) macrosystem and, (e) chrono-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The microsystem is the pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relationships that surround the individual. The meso-system includes linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings. The exo-system is the linkage and processes between two or more settings but does not include the individual directly. The macrosystem consists of the overreaching

effects of the micro-, meso- and exo-systems, and the culture or subculture that the individual identifies with, and the chrono-system which includes customs, structures, opportunities, and life course options over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This theory relates to the individual being influenced directly and in-directly while accessing the systems, and programs when trying to meet their housing needs. The chrono-system directly impacts the individual's options that she or he chose and covers the overall time dimension in an individual's life. Ecological system theory has been used in several studies relating to young adults transitioning.

In a study by San Antonio (2016), the focus was on individual concerns of young adults transiting from a rural community with few opportunities and growth, to a college in a possible urban setting away from family and out-migration. Van Breda and Dickens (2016) explored young adults transitioning from residential care in South Africa and the implications of moving from an apartheid state to a democratic state and the implications for child welfare and how to encourage further growth. Lastly, a study by Schwartz and Soudien (2015) revealed the factors that can interrupt young adults from breaking the cycle of poverty in South Africa as well and the need for further policy development to address those issues. The current study benefited from these studies in that they were all focused on the current needs and future growth of young adults, the need for movement to new locations or ideology, and the need for development of, or expansion to current policies.

Transitional Issues and Outcomes

Adversities

Young adults in state care have faced many difficulties in life that have led them to the point of having to be removed from the home of their biological parents. The HHS-AFCARS Preliminary Report (2018) revealed the top 10 reasons that youth were removed from the home and included the following:

1. Neglect (163,543 or 62%),

2. Parental Drug Abuse (94,386 or 36%),

3. Caretaker inability to cope (35,802 or 14%),

4. Physical Abuse (33,672 or 13%),

5. Housing (27,323 or 10%),

6. Child Behavior Problems (22,868 or 95),

7. Parent Incarceration (19,719 or 7%),

8. Parental Alcohol Abuse (13,871 or 5%),

9. Abandonment (12,088 or 5%), and

10. Sexual Abuse (9,874 or 4%).

While seemingly safe under the auspices of state care, many young adults continue with new difficulties that may arise after they exit the foster care system, including adverse outcomes. Homeless young adults may encounter adversities as they make their way through transient episodes (Ferguson et al. 2014). Adversities such as homelessness, criminality, social stigmatization, lifestyle changes, early parenting, substance abuse, employment challenges, and education pursuits (Bender et al., 2015; Dion et al. 2014).

Winetrobe et al. (2017), in their study of 444 homeless young adults attending LA One, a

drop-in shelter, found that 52% of the sample who identified as being homeless were

Black, and had a history of injection drug use (Morton et al., 2017) noted that homeless

young adults nationally were estimated at 26,000 with 1 in 10 young adults identified with

sleeping on the streets or in shelters, running away or having been kicked out of their

homes, and couch surfing,

      These reports suggest that young adults have a pre-dysfunctional start on home and

family life and that this dysfunction may worsen once they transition from care.

Additionally, Black Americans experience a greater risk for homelessness and substance

abuse (Morton et al., 2017), and that a significant number of young adults nationally

identified with living on the streets, in shelters and couch suffering due to ongoing

instability and lack of permanent housing.

Mental Illness and Disruption of Care

One of the adverse effects of youth who are removed from the home and put under state

care is that of mental illness and disruption of care. AFCARS (2018) reported in 2018 that

roughly 270,000 youth entered the foster care system. The top four reasons (of 15 total)

that so many youths were removed from the home were due to neglect at 62% (166,991),

drug abuse of the parent at 36% (96,720), caregiver inability to cope at 14% (37,057), and

physical abuse at 12% (33,530), (AFCARS, 2018). In the current study, family

dysfunction was also revealed as a major factor with 3 or 37 percent of young adults

reporting parental issues, and 3 or 37 percent who stated parental drug and alcohol abuse

specifically as a direct cause for leaving the home. Additionally, 2 or 25 percent of

participants reported behavioral issues as the reason for their transition. Bronfenbrenner (1977) believed that the family was the closest to the developing individual as represented within the micro system. Considering these issues, some of the adverse effects seen by youth in state care are that of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and a desire to self-harm. (Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2015; Gabrielli et al., 2015). Fakunmoju and Bammeke (2015), used a convenience sample of 502 adults and youths ages 13-23 years of age, revealed that 40% of participants who had been physically abused by parents also associated with anxiety and depression. Gabrielli et al. (2015) used a longitudinal study to examine 135 youths, 8 to 11 years of age, found that 25% of youth involved with child welfare services disclosed a desire to die, and 21% had a desire to self-arm. Family dysfunction plays a major role in the development of young adults and has devastating and long-lasting effects that plays out in many negative ways effecting not only their physical and mental growth, but also their ability to effectively cope with life (Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2015). Past studies have revealed the causes of mental illness and disruption in care as the results of a dysfunctional family unit.   A major cause of young adults' removal from home and put under state care was due in large part to parental negligence and substance abuse (AFCARS, 2018). Similar results were also found within the current study.

Homelessness

The Homeless Alliance (HA; 2015) reported that most of young adults who exit state care may experience subsequent adverse outcomes up to and including at least one episode of homelessness. While many young adults exit the foster care system annually,

many do so without finding stable, affordable, permanent living arrangements with family or another household (HA, 2015). Past studies estimate that 30% of emancipated young adults will experience homelessness in the first 1-3 years (HUD, 2014; Richards, 2014). Statistics from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD, 2016) reported that of 5,583 young adults that NYTD surveyed through three waves of data collection at 17, 19, and 21 years of age, approximately 43% related having a homeless episode by the age of 21.

A review of the Midwest Study of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (*N*=435) revealed that between 31 to 46% of the study participants had been homeless at least once by the age of 26 (Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013); Bender et al,(2015), found young adults reported extended periods of homelessness. In Texas, 1,577 young adults were emancipated in 2012, with 12-22% becoming homeless on the first day out (HHS, 2013). The Child Trends (2015) data bank identified unaccompanied youths as children and youths who were homeless and on their own—that is, not living with their families. This group included "runaway" youths who were encouraged to leave home or locked out of their home and independent youths who left their families due to irreconcilable conflicts, abuse or victimization, or where loss of contact has made it impossible for them to return home (Child Trends, 2015).

Several factors contribute to homelessness among children and youth. In surveys of city officials, the most frequently cited reasons for family homelessness are a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence (Child Trends, 2015). However, for unaccompanied youths, the chief factors cited were mental illness, substance abuse, and

lack of affordable housing (Child Trends, 2015). These studies show four important

characteristics: The timing of homelessness, who is at most risk, the role of early home

life, and the commonality of housing instability. First, homelessness can occur at any time.

For some young adults transitioning from state care can have an episode of homeless

within 1-3 days, while other studies show that homelessness can come about almost

immediately after transitioning (HHS, 2013). Second, Black Americans share an

increased risk not only for homelessness, but substance abuse issues as well (Dworsky, et

al, 2013). Bender et al. (2015) Third, early home life dysfunction plays a vital role in the

long-term capability of young adults to develop critical thinking and coping skills which

may become exacerbated by many challenges, barriers, and adversities (Bronfenbrenner,

1977).   Finally, there is a commonality of unstable housing situations and a basic need to

establish stable or permanent housing for future growth. (Dworsky, et al, 2013). Bender et

al. (2015).

In summary, there are several reasons why young adults remain vulnerable to

homelessness, to include: 1. Lack of affordable housing, poverty, domestic violence,

mental illness, and substance abuse. 2, Becoming homeless can happen quickly,

sometimes within 1-3 days after discharge from care or immediately in some cases. 3)

Family dysfunction plays a major role in the development of young adults and can have

detrimental effects on the child's ability to learn and develop coping and problem-solving

skills Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Criminality

The NYTD (2014) revealed that youths that were incarcerated within the first 2 years of exiting care, varied by age included ages 17 (37%), 19 (24%), and 20 (20%). Mitchel et al., (2015) revealed in their study that 25% of participants reported that they were confined in a jail, prison, correctional facility or juvenile correction or detention center for allegedly committing crimes. This is an interesting observation in ecological theory, as Bronfenbrenner (1977), believed that the microsystem is where young developing individuals would get the most direction or teaching in many skills to include coping, and problem-solving skills. Instead, if the family is dysfunctionally unable to provide the direction or teaching needed, the person's behavior is then vulnerable to delinquency (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Dion et al. (2014) showed that young people who age out of foster care are more likely to have been involved with the justice and criminal systems than their peers in the general population. Covenant House (2019) noted that of the 30% of the 100,000 young people who exit formal custody of the juvenile justice system are discharged back to families with domestic violence, substance abuse, unresolved mental health disabilities and poverty, end up returning within 3 years.

In summary, past studies have shown that foster care alumni at a high risk of being incarcerated within 2 years after exiting state care, and within 1 to 3 years once returned to dysfunctional families. In the context of the study (n=8), there were 4 participants who were foster care alumni, and had involvement with the justice system. Additional1y, there was 1 participant who was not a foster care alum, but did discuss having violated his probation at one point which also revealed his involvement with the justice system, .

Social Stigmatization

Past research has found that the study of homelessness and stigmatization has a long history which goes back to the 1800s. Lee et al. (2010) traced the origins of homelessness through the history of American sociology and identified three major timeframes: The Tramp (1880-1920), the Great Depression (1929-1939), and the Skid Row (1940-1970) eras. During this time, homelessness was simply defined as single men who drank heavily, moved often, and had few attachments (Lee et al., 2010). Since the 1980s there has been an expansion of the definition of homelessness. Lee et al. (2010) cited Rossi's (year) definition of homelessness as not having customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling. In the 1980s, the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act offered another definition that refers to the absence of an adequate nighttime residence (citation). The act also specified physical presence in selected locations, such as shelters, institutional settings, and places not intended for human habitation as a significant condition to establish one's homelessness. Street venues such as sidewalks, subway tunnels, terminals, abandoned apartment buildings or individuals temporarily staying in cheap hotels were considered homeless (Lee et al, 2010). In addition, Lee et al. contended that homeless people are aware of the negative characteristics that are acquainted with a homeless lifestyle including being lazy, filthy, irresponsible, and dangerous. The authors stated that the stigma associated with homelessness is reinforced through the visibility of the condition and the reactions of housed individuals who ignore the homeless or subject them to stares, verbal harassment or violence (Lee et al, 2010).

Young adults seeking independent living may find themselves homeless and stigmatized as well. Toolis and Hammack (2015) found that there were similar endorsements of negative attitudes toward the homeless such as having a mental illness, drug addiction, or being involved in crime. Collins (2015) noted that negative public perceptions, stigma, and inherent stereotypes about homeless youth are born from a society that culturally believes that poverty is equated to individual failure. Additionally, the public attitude registers a high degree of social distancing, less support for public assistance, and higher support for anti-homelessness policies that prevent people from panhandling and sitting, and sleeping in public areas (Toolis & Hammack, 2015). The result is the criminalization of homelessness, leaving unhoused young adults at a higher risk of displacement, unwarranted searches, and police brutality. Toolis and Hammack stated that the stigmatization of homelessness as criminal may push young adults into more remote and dangerous spaces. This situation results in increased exposure to environmental elements, violence as well as an increased likelihood of abuse, injury, and death. In summary, young adults have faced many adversities in becoming independent beings. Adversities such as homelessness, stigmatization, criminalization for minimal infractions and increased negative police interaction. Not all young adults who leave foster care leave unprepared, there are thousands who are helped with support from entities like the Preparation for Adult Living program (DFPS, 2017) where many youths are being helped daily in finding social services support and transitional living.

Behavior Choices

The behavior choices of youths who initially transition from care can be grossly

different post-state care. While not every young adult transitioning faces the same adverse

lifestyle challenges, Bender et al. (2015) revealed that youth who aged out often resided

with friends or relatives. Otherwise, they moved to foster homes or other facilities such as

shelters. Curry and Adams (2015) found that foster care young adults who age out

experienced a problematic transition to adulthood. Over 30% of youth who have aged out

of the system experienced multiple temporary housing arrangements, while about 40% of

them experienced at least one night without a place to sleep (Boldis, 2014). Prior research

has shown that the lifestyles of homeless young adults can be very precarious and can

include risky behaviors such as criminal activities, involvement with deviant peers or

substance abusers, and sexual deviancy to earn money (Ferguson et al, 2014).

Early Parenting

An added lifestyle risk for young adults is that of early parenthood. Finer and

Zolina (2016) noted that unintended pregnancy rates are highest among poor and low-

income women 18-24 years of age, and among cohabitating women, and minority women.

However, Dion, Dworsky, Krauff and Kleinman (2014) found teen pregnancy is much

higher among youth in foster care than amid adolescents in the general population. Youth

in foster care are either already parents by the time they age out of foster care or become

parents soon after that. Additionally, of the 5,583 young adults surveyed by the NYTD

(2016), 31 percent of females had reportedly given birth, while 23 percent of males

reported they had fathered a child. Dion et al. (2014) argued that complications from early

parenthood may exacerbate the search for stable housing. Exacerbating factors are that as some young adults may not have finished high school, it complicates their ability to attain satisfactory employment and higher education. Additionally, money spent on childcare takes away from their ability to pay rent. However, some young adults may view early parenthood as a kind of advantage. Early parenthood may permit young adults aging out of care to become eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits or housing assistance not available otherwise (Dion et al. 2014).

Substance Abuse

An alternative lifestyle for young adults seeking independent living is involvement in substance abuse. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) (2016) surveyed youth at 17, 19, and 21 years of age. The survey revealed that 28% of 17 years old, 24% of 19 years old, and 21% of those 21 years of age, had received referrals for substance abuse. Maria, Padhye, Yang, Gallardo, Saxtons, Jung and Businelle (2018) revealed that the mortality rate among homeless youths is 10 times higher than that of housed youth, with drug overdose being one of the leading causes of death. Additionally, the authors contend that up to 86% of homeless youth met the DSM IV diagnostic criteria for drug dependence or abuse (Maria et al. 2018).

Employment

While there are choices that young adults chose that may put them at high risk for adversity, there are some challenges that are inherent in assimilating into society. Curry and Adams (2015); and Dworsky and Gitlow (2017) contend that young adults suffer from low rates of employment, unstable work history, and earnings that are often less than the

poverty threshold of a single adult. Ferguson, Bender, and Thompson (2018) revealed in their study that rates of formal employment for homeless young adults were low compared with their housed peers, 62% for housed young adults (ages 20-24), this compares to an employment rate of 40% to 60% of homeless young adults, from various street and shelter-based samples. In a study by LifeWorks (2016), it was reported that foster youth have lower average household income than for non-foster youth: $207.70 a month versus $1,006.60 for non-foster care youth. Additionally, Dworsky and Gitlow (2017) contend that over time, the employment rates of young adults who age out of care tend to remain low well into their mid-twenties and many of them were not able to support themselves even with the creation of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. Allmang (2019) cited issues such as globalization, changes in technology, and the weakening of unions that have led to changes in the work force in the United States, and because of these changes young adults 16 to 24 are more likely to accept jobs that are uncertain, unpredictable and risky.

Education

Poor education outcomes are also a major problem for both young adults aging out of care and those who are homeless. Boldis (2014) found in a review of the Midwest Study data that foster care alumni were 14 times less likely to complete college than their peers from the general population. Curry and Abrams (2015) found that youths with low attainment of education were primarily foster kids. The General Accounting Office (GAO, 2016) presented several findings: first, there is a smaller percentage of foster care alumni who enrolled in and completed college compared to other youths. Second, several issues GAO identified that make it difficult for foster youth to pursue college included: weak

academic foundations, limited family support, lack of awareness of available financial

resources, and age barriers (GAO, 2016). Due to a loss of social support, young adults

might be at a disadvantage when engaging with social agency systems (Bender et al.,

2015). In an HHS program that provides a voucher for college expenses to foster youth up

to age 23, eligibility will only apply if the young adult started receiving the voucher before

age 21. However, foster youth who start college after age 21, are not eligible for the

program (Bender et al., 2015). In addition, the authors contend that inability to complete

educational pursuits or develop employment skills will ultimately leave young adults at

risk for financial instability. Allmang (2019) contends with this assessment as his study

revealed that in 2016, workers with less than a high school diploma had an unemployment

rate of 7.4 percent and a median income of $504.00 a week, while those with a bachelor's

degree had a 2.4 unemployment rate and an average income of $1,156.00 per week.

Help for Young Adults in Transition

There are several options that are available to help young adults obtain

independent living arrangements. These options include the provision of special housing

programs, development of supportive legislation, state-mandated life skills training for

foster care alumni and new housing programs for homeless young adults.

Housing Types

One of the most critical services that most states provide is that of assisting with

transitional housing. Housing support can be viewed from two prospective, such as

whether the programs are for private or public housing. Dion et al., (2014) reviewed an

inventory of 57 national housing programs for youth aging out of care. The program

consisted of several housing support types which includes: (a) housing assistance, (b) funding sources, (c) delivery of supportive services, (d) participant tracking, (e) clustered or scattered site, (f) on-sight supervision or not, (g) those with 30 percent of income limits, and (h) those with -stipends available in some instances (Dion et al., 2014).

Transitional housing has many payment types as well, including housing subsidies, monthly allowances, or one-time payments for housing-related costs. However, the adequacy and availability of housing assistance vary widely, not only by state but also by the county where the individual lives (Dion et al, 2014). While housing subsidies may be available, they may also be insufficient in costly urban areas. Some benefits are available only to selective young adults (full-time students), and programs may screen out those most in need of assistance (Dion et al., 2014). States may spend up to 30 percent of their Chafee funds on "room and board' to help young people who are aging out of foster care address their housing needs. In a survey or 44 states and the District of Columbia Dion, Dworsky, Krauff, and Kleinman (2014), found that most states were using their Chafee dollars to provide transitional housing or to pay for rental security deposits, utilities, furniture, and even food. A majority of states also reported that they supplement the federal funds they spend on housing with state dollars. (Dion et al,,2014).

Housing Program Options

There are several housing options for youths transitioning out of care as well as homeless young adults who seek the services. One option is the Family Unification Program (FUP) which is a program for youth 18-21 years of age developed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] (2016). FUP provides a housing

voucher and other services for young adults. Youths can stay for up to 18 months, however; not all public housing agencies (PHAs) offer vouchers (HUD, 2016). Section 8 vouchers are payment documents provided through the Family Unification Program (FUP), that allows some public housing agencies the ability to give priority to foster youth (HUD, 2016).

Another option is the Independent Living Program (ILP), which is a program to addresses youth homelessness and can include instruction programs for job readiness and retention, nutrition and housekeeping, transitional housing and assistance with high school, GED completion, or attending college (Curry & Abrams, 2015). A third option is the Rapid Rehousing Models for Youth, which is a program designed to assist transition age youth in obtaining and retaining housing, and a final option is the Youth Homeless Demonstration Program, which is designed to end youth homelessness (HUD Exchange, 2018), While the latter two programs seem very promising, they are new programs and are available in limited areas within 11 counties and 4 states (HUD Exchange, 2018).

The LifeWorks Program

In light of gloomy prognostications for the future of young adults transitioning from state care, these future adverse outcomes appear to run contrary to provisions made by the Texas Department of Family Protective Service (DFPS, 2015). The DFPS mandates that youths who are in care be engaged in both informal and formal experiential life skills training. Youths are required to receive informal training while under care and attend formal training while in pre-separation status by attending the Preparation for Adult

Living (PAL) Program. The PAL program helps older young adults in foster care prepare for their departure and transition from DFPS care and support (DFPS, 2015).

Challenges to Finding Housing

Problems with finding permanent housing are the same for young adults transitioning out of care, as they are for homeless young adults. The barriers standing between safe, decent, and stable housing includes a variety of factors such as access, cost, education, and employment (HUD, 2017).

Access and Barriers

Access to permanent housing is affected by issues such as availability, affordability, and prioritization. Availability includes the types of accommodations available in a particular area where the young adult wants to live. Affordability is a second big concern and deals with income requirements or qualifications for entry. Access relies a great deal on the prioritization of who gets admitted (HUD, 2017). State and federal housing priorities initially targeted low income, disabled, and the elderly. However, veterans, the elderly disabled, homeless individuals, and families that were left homeless due to natural disasters are high on HUD priority lists (HUD Public Housing Assistance Program, 2017; HUD VASH, 2017). For young adults seeking housing, getting around these barriers is especially troublesome, due in part to low education, unemployment or under-employment of this population (HUD, 2017).

Cost

The cost of housing can be prohibitive and varies by state and area, which is another problem for the homeless. Curry and Abrams (2015) revealed that homeless

young adults are plagued with multiple financial issues including lower income, higher unemployment, and placement at or below poverty levels. Education or undereducation plays a vital role in this matter as well. While housing options may exist for young homeless adults, there are many challenges and barriers. Permanent housing is affected by issues such as availability, affordability, and prioritization. Availability concerns what types of accommodations are available in a particular area where the young adult wants to live. Affordability is a second big concern and deals with income requirements or qualifications for entry. Access relies a great deal on the prioritization of who gets admitted (HUD, 2017). State and federal housing priorities initially targeted low income, disabled, and the elderly. However, veterans, the elderly disabled, homeless individuals, and families that were left homeless due to natural disasters are high on HUD priority lists (HUD, 2017).

The complexities surrounding access and barriers for housing are major issues for young adults in addition to competition from other just as needy populations (HUD, 2017). The cost of housing can be prohibitive and varies by state and area, which is another problem for the homeless. Curry and Abrams (2015) study found that homeless young adults are plagued with multiple financial issues including lower income, higher unemployment, and stagnancy at or below poverty levels. Additionally, education or undereducation plays a vital role in this matter as well.

Cassady (2018) studied the effects of homelessness on society and found that two thirds of homeless individuals had either mental illness or substance abuse problems over 100 times higher than non-homeless individuals. In light of these findings, the author

examined seven domains to include: (1) heath care, (2) mental health, (3) incarceration (4) shelter, (5) supportive housing, (6) moral and ethical difficulties, and (7) the cost to local economies and businesses. Cassady (2018) found that homeless individuals who presented to the hospital when ill, cost $2,400 per incident. Mental health charges were $996 per day spent in a psychiatric unit, and $220 per day in a detox unit. The cost of living in shelters was another high dollar event which totaled roughly $2,897 per month, with supported housing in the lower range of $605 per month. Lastly, the cost to merchants, tourist, and cities were mentioned primarily as potential revenue loss with the need of individuals to weigh the moral and ethical challenge of homelessness as a human right (Cassady, 2018).

Legislation

Over the past 3 decades, there have been numerous attempts to assist youth in successful transitioning via the promulgation of laws. The Independent Living Program (ILP) was developed in 1980 and is a policy that includes instructional programs for job readiness and retention, nutrition and housekeeping, transitional housing and assistance with high school diploma or GED or attending college (Curry &Abrams, 2015). The Foster Care Independence Act expanded the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program with increased funding and expanded eligibility to aged out young adults up to age 21 (Richards, 2014). States are now allowed to utilize up to 30 percent of the financing for housing (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act [PL. 110-351] allowed states to administer reimbursable adoption care or guardianship assistance payments for young adults up to age 21 if they met several requirements. To qualify,

young adults must be engaged in secondary, post-secondary, or vocation education, and

must work at least 80 hours per month. The work required is waived if the person is

unable to work or participate in education activities due to a medical condition (Curry &

Abrams, 2015).

For non-foster care homeless youth and young adults, the McKinney-Vento

Homeless Assistance Act (PL 100-77) was the first major federal legislation to ensure

homeless youth get educational assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Title

VII of the McKenney-Vento Act authorizes the emergency shelter and transitional housing

programs which are administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development

[HUD] (2018). Programs in this category includes the Emergency Shelter Grant program

(expanded from the program created by the Homeless Housing Act in 1986), the

Supportive Housing Demonstration Program, Supplemental Assistance for Facilities to

Assist the Homeless, and Section 8 Single Room Occupancy Moderate Rehabilitation

(HUD, 2018). An additional program includes the Shelter Plus Care (S+C) Program under

title IV of the McKinney-Vento Act that provides rental assistance for homeless people

with disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse and acquired immunodeficiency

syndrome (AIDS; HUD, 2018).

Summary

Chapter 2 began with a literature review of search strategies utilized for the study.

The chapter then outlined the issue of adversities with young adults transitioning from

care. The adversities section covers topics including mental illness and disruption of care,

homelessness, criminality, and social stigma. In addition, Chapter 2 looked at the

challenges facing youth in search of permanent housing to include access, barriers and cost. Finally, a review of the legislation that was specifically developed to help young adults succeed is presented. The next chapter covers the behavior choices of emancipated youth and some of the issues they may encounter to include: early parenting, substance abuse, as well as issues with employment and education. The next chapter examines housing types which are presented to show the type of housing support available for youth in transition to include the Family Reunification Program (FUP) which includes the section 8 voucher program, and the LifeWorks Program.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences, perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care, incarceration, or a homeless out of care base. Chapter 3 will detail the broad aspect of the research foundation and process and will cover several major topics including (a) the research design and tradition, (b) the research question, (c) the researcher's role, (d) population and sampling procedures, (e) the interview protocol instrument, (f) data collection, (g) coding, and (h) analysis.

The research design that I used for this study was a purposive, inductive design. The research tradition I chose for this study was a generic qualitative inquiry which is a type of research that has a focus on the external aspect of the lived experiences of individuals (Percy et al., 2015). Percy et.al, (2015) related that generic qualitative inquiry rests on several pillars: (a) it has the ability to analyze people's attitudes, (b) the fact that it is explanatory, and (c) it has a focus on the external content of experiences. This type of research is appropriate as a study as it allows for the researcher to consider multiple aspect of an individual's experiences within the ecological theoretic framework.

The Research Question

RQ: What were the experiences, perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care, incarceration, or a homeless out-of-home care base?

Researcher Role

Sanjari et al. (2014) provided a broad overview of the functions of the researcher as being (a) the primary instrument, (b) investigator, (c) data collector, (d) stranger, (e)

initiator, (f) insider, and (g) expert. In addition, while these are external roles, the researcher is also tasked with internal functions such as (a) confidant, (b) keeper of data shared, and (c) mediator (Sanjari et al., 2014). Because of the many roles of the researcher, I was conscious of potential conflicts of interest or power differentials and strove to make each participant comfortable and safe during the interview. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with any potential participants and worked to recruit those with whom I did not have a personal relationship. I used the concept of bracketing which is a concept usually used in phenomenological studies but is also a part of the qualitative tradition. Bracketing is defined by Simon (2011) as a process where the researcher creates a distance from previously held theories and assumptions to become a nonparticipating observer of conscious experiences of the world. I accomplished bracketing by suspending any presumptions, bias, or previous experiences that I may have had and remained neutral to participant responses.

Population and Sampling Procedures

Participants

The sample of this study included young adults 18-24 years of age who are foster care alumni, postincarcerated and those who were homeless, who have left their out-of-home care base within the past 4 years and were then engaged in independent living. The rationale for this age group is that some young adults may emancipate state care at the age of 18, while others may opt to remain in custody up to the age of 21 (see DFPS, 2018).

Participant Recruitment

Based on Covid-19, I had to make changes to the participant recruitment and sampling, outside of what I had originally intended and what was approved in the proposal. I intended to use a purposive sampling strategy and participants were to be those who responded to posters placed on notice boards outside of a life skills training program, social media, and email to my professional contacts. I needed to adjust this recruitment to also include other online social media such as Facebook and Linked In and with individuals who could talk to friends about the study.

Snowball sampling was also originally in the plan—one that proved infinitely useful in the time of Covid-19. Snowball sampling, as defined by Dharampal et al. (2014), is a process where each interviewee is asked to recommend additional individuals who could participate in the study. I provided to individuals an informational notice of the study that included (a) type of research, (b) qualifications of participants, (c) consent form requirement, (d) a 1-hour time requirement per personal interview, (e) a $15 gift card, and (f) contact information on how to contact researcher via telephone. I asked participants to share study information with other contacts they had.

Sample Size

In qualitative studies, the sample size is much smaller than those of quantitative. This difference in sample size is because they are focused on meaning, they do not use generalized hypotheses statements, and small samples are used in qualitative studies as saturation can occur early in the analysis process, revealing that larger samples do not necessarily mean more information (Mason, 2010). The target number of participants for

this study was 8-12. The sample size of 8-12 was chosen due primarily for estimations regarding saturation. I ultimately ended up with 8 participants for the study, which did allow for ample saturation.

Mason (2010) stated that the guiding principle for sample size should focus be saturation. Saturation occurs when the researcher no longer releases information that adds to the theory that has been developed (Malterud et al., 2016). Additionally, Malterud et, al (2016) proposed that info power indicates that the more information the sample holds relevant for the actual study, the lower number of participants are needed. Participants considered for the study were 18-24 years of age, have been in transition from out-of-home or out-of-agency placements within the past 4 years, may be both members of the general population or foster care alumni, and have acquired or working to obtain permanent housing.

Saturation

Fusch and Ness (2015) prescribed eight methods to attain saturation and named three particular outcomes that will inform the researcher that saturation has occurred. The eight methods include (a) the use of interviews, (b) interviewer questions, (c) multiple participants answering the same issues, (d) interviewing people that one would not normally consider, (e) the use of focus groups, (f) saturation grids, (g) second party conduct coding of transcripts, and (h) triangulation of data are all effective measures to ensure saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When using these methods, the researcher should then be able to determine the level of saturation, (a) when enough information has been compiled to replicate the study, (b) when the ability to obtain no additional new data and

(c) when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved saturation in several ways, 1) I was able to get a set amount of individuals (n=8) to participate. 2) I had over seventeen questions on the interview protocol, with follow up questions if needed for clarity. 3) I had over seventeen different topic areas that I covered from first transition, to what type of social service programs have you used etc. 4) I then compiled all the data on two matrix formats, and I was able to get thick, rich descriptions, leading to saturation.

Interview Protocol Instrument

Merriam (2009) noted that basic qualitative research is used to understand how (a) people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. I wrote interview questions by focusing on young adult lived experiences and how these experiences had impacted their subsequent housing acquirement. I established validity by having the instrument reviewed by committee members for appropriateness and its ability to address the research question adequately. I also used three data collection instruments: a self-developed interview protocol instrument, an audio recorder, and a researcher's field notebook.

I created an interview protocol instrument (See Appendix C) which included (a) study overview to participants, (b) my role as researcher, (c) a blank consent form, and d) a set of open-ended questions to support semi-structured interviews. I used an audio recorder, which was used later for reiterative review and transcription. I also used my researcher's field note journal to capture notes on the study's progression and provide information concerning participant nonverbal behaviors revealed during the interview.

Data Analysis Methodology

Data Analysis Goals

Data analyses for this study consisted of five major goals and corresponding activities to achieve them. These five goals included the following. First, answer the research question. Creswell (2009) identified two major research question categories: the central question and assorted sub-questions. The goal of these questions are to allow the exploration of the central phenomenon or concept of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Second, I aligned the information as it pertains to ecological theory and three of five sub-systems of micro, meso and chrono, and the five propositions chosen among them. Ecological theory provided a framework to help explain human development within the environmental subsystems that a person may encounter and how this interaction affects the outcome of his or her experiences (see Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Third, I assessed the information to produce an assessment analysis product by which to identify themes, narratives, similarities, and differences among participant's stories. By using ecological theory, I was able to access both human development and the environmental subsystem interaction experiences that will allow for an in-depth assessment analysis product (see Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Fourth, I developed narratives so that each participant's story can be told from its most fundamental aspects. Tracy (2010) suggested that thick descriptions are one of the most important means of achieving credibility in qualitative research, using in-depth illustrations, culturally situated means, and abundant concrete detail.

Finally, I developed a set of information on findings, conclusions, summary, and recommendations as appropriate. This goal was accomplished by using the framework method by Gale et al. (2013). The framework method calls for a thorough review of transcripts searching for themes, impressions and characteristics, development of a spreadsheet matrix, and coded summaries for review and analysis (Gale, et al, 2013). I used MS Word to code the data and review for emergent themes. I will discuss the coding process further in the remaining sections of this chapter.

The Analysis Methodology

First. I used the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data as prescribed by Gale et al. (2013). The framework method as outlined by Gale et al. uses a multi-step approach. I (a) transcribed the data from the audio tape, (b) performed a line by line review of transcripts and apply a label or code to items of relevancy, (c) completed reviews of transcripts searching for themes, impressions, and characteristics, (d) created a spreadsheet and develop a matrix, and (e) enter coded summaries for review and analysis. I also used MS Word software to create nodes to confirm and validate new or previously established themes found.

Second, I reviewed the data to align it with the ecological theory concepts as it relates to the microsystem with Propositions 2 and 4 that looks at the relationship between the researcher and participant dynamics. The meso-system with Propositions 5 and 7, centered around the interconnectedness between settings experienced by the participant, and transitions that occur in a person's life due to changes in roles, settings, or maturation. Finally, the macrosystem with Proposition 9, that considers the subculture, patterns of

structure, and the movement away from previous ideologies, activities, re-defining goals and interconnections.

Third, I then reviewed the information again for commonalities, differences, and similarities within each participants' story and develop narratives of each participant. Fourth, I drew conclusions of the data by noting these differences, similarities, commonalities, and narratives of each participant. Fifth, I answered the research question and developed an overall general report and summary which describes the findings of the study and provide conclusions and recommendations.

Participant Screening

Participant screening began when prospective participants contacted me via telephone with interest of being selected for study. Potential participants were first questioned on the basic criteria that is listed on the posting (see Appendix). Participants needed to meet four criteria requirements:

- Participants must be 18 to 24 years of age
- Can be foster care alumni, those with a history of incarceration or those who have experienced homelessness
- Must have been emancipated within the last four years
- Currently in or working toward acquiring stable or permanent housing

Interview Scheduling

Data collection began with scheduling participants for interviews, and varied depending on participant availability. I used a schedule that included 4-8 weeks to contact participants and complete the interviews—especially given Covid-19 was a growing

problem. I was also flexible to add additional time to ensure all participants had ample opportunities to meet in case of cancellations or missed appointments.

Data Collection

I interviewed the participant during teleconference. I started the process by providing an overview of the study and ensuring that all pertinent consent forms are signed. I then worked to help the participant to relax and get comfortable by engaging in light banter regarding mine and their backgrounds.

I connected the data to the research questions by use of the interview protocol instrument asking participants questions about their experiences, perceptions, and opinions about acquiring many topics, but especially with permanent housing. I collected data via the interview protocol instrument, audio recording, video chat or teleconferencing, researcher's field notes, and reflective journal. I also used a researcher's field notes journal to capture identifying personal demographics of participants to include: gender, age, and ethnicity.

Interview Debriefing

After the interview were over, I shared a brief overview of what I covered, and asked participants if they felt comfortable with the interview outcome, and responded to any questions they had. I reminded participants that their information will be kept confidential and that I will remove all identifiers via coding so that their identity will remain anonymous. I also informed participants that I will share the study with them after completion of the study if they would like to see it. I then sent them a gift card via mail.

Transcription

After each interview was completed, I processed the recording to a transcribed PDF file and ensure that I typed the field notes and any journaling that I may have noted during the interview. After I had all the interviews transcribed, I then assigned different codes as appropriate.

Coding

I developed a coding journal where I coded each individual's personal information. I identified and separate out the data by the 15 main interview questions and coded them as well. Next, I sorted and coded the data based on ecological theory themes of micro, meso and macro, as well as the narratives, as well as codes that I created with my chair. I used MS Word software to code. Odem et al. (2015) revealed that providing the codes, themes, and narratives is one method to interpret content analysis study. Now that all of the data are coded and analyzed, I intend to keep all identifying information in a locked file cabinet in my home for a period of 5 years, after which I will destroy all data.

<p align="center">**Sources of Trustworthiness**</p>

Credibility

Stacy (2010) stated that credibility refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude and plausibility of the research finding, and that it represents a credible account on cultural, social, individual, and common-sense levels. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that credibility in qualitative research is accomplished in nine ways: (1) triangulation, (2) member checking, (3) an audit trail, (4) disconfirming evidence, (5) prolonged engagement in the field, (6) the use of thick, rich descriptions, (7) researcher reflexivity,

(8) collaboration, and (9) peer debriefing. I used as many of these techniques as needed. I used triangulation by utilizing data generated from interview transcripts and field notes, which will also lead to acquiring thick, rich descriptions.

Transferability

Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, and Blackman (2016) noted that transferability can be established by(a) the use of multiple participants with varied backgrounds, (b) using experiences to derive rich, thick descriptions of their experiences, and by (c) triangulating data from multiple sources. In this study, I used the three methodologies as mentioned above.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Moon et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers should document research design and implementation, including methodology and methods, details of data collection via field notes, memos, the researcher's reflexivity journal, and reflective appraisal of the project (Moon et al. 2016). I documented the methodology and methods used, by using an interview protocol instrument, researcher's field notes and taped recordings which were transcribed and used for triangulation.

Lastly, I used a reflective appraisal of the study to ensure an audit trail and dependability of the study can be confirmed. Odom et al. (2015) noted that coding documents can maintain confirmability as a way to have an audit trail which helps to

achieve confirmation. I attempted to ensure that I coded my records in an efficient way as to enable audit confirmation if necessary.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. Triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I used data from transcribed participant interviews, researcher field notes, and my reflective journal to accomplish triangulation.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested that it is important for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may shape their inquiry and to acknowledge biases early in the research process, and to bracket these biases as the research proceeds (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I used reflective journal to note any personal beliefs, values, and prejudice that I may have as I progress into the research process.

<center>**Ethical Procedures**</center>

Treatment of Human Participants

The Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2015) states that the goals of the treatment of human participants are to ensure that equitable sampling is accomplished that is appropriate to the research question and to exclude vulnerable individuals whom the research procedures cannot adequately protect them (IRB, 2015). In addition, The National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2018) researcher training guidelines identify twelve

classes of vulnerable individuals to include: (a) Minors (17 and under), (b) residents of any facility (such as prison, treatment facilities, or nursing homes), (c) mentally disabled individuals, (d) emotionally disturbed individuals, (e) pregnant women, (f) subordinates of the researcher,(g) students of the researcher, (h) clients or potential clients of the researcher, (i) individuals who are in crisis (such as natural disaster victims or persons with an acute illness), (j) emotionally disadvantaged individuals, and (k) elderly individuals (65+).

IRB Ethical Treatment of Human Participant Certification & IRB Approval Number

My proposal was approved, after completing the course on ethical treatment of human participants in studies, and upon review of submitted study proposal. My IRB approval number is: 12-23-20-0277807.

For this study I identified possible vulnerable populations who may be chosen to participate and are defined as: (a) individuals who might be less than fluent in English, and (b) economically disadvantaged individuals. In all cases, I ensured that each participant was appropriate and capable of completing the study.

I informed them that they are not required to participate in the study if they do not feel comfortable and allow them to opt out if they should decide to do so. In addition, I reassured participants that the interview area is safe and free from harm. I was patient with participants and allow them extra time to process the information or questions asked. I strived to do no harm during the process and allow participants time to ask questions or get clarification.

Treatment of Data

I collected the data via semi-structured interviews with young adults which. The names of each participant were removed and I provided each participant with a unique identifier (e.g., P#1, P#2…). I ensured that all information received, to include names and contact information of potential participants, will be kept in confidence and I transcribed the field notes and save on my computer hard drive with a password to back up all research data for future reference if needed. I kept all data secured in a locked file cabinet in my home when not in use. All information on audio file, hard drive and researcher's journal data and field notes will be available for auditing if needed. I will keep the data for 5 years, and after said time, will destroy data gathered to include researcher's journal, field notes, and material from audio recordings and my computer hard drive.

Adverse Events

I ensured that I had support contact information in hand to refer participants to in case of adverse events. Depending on the circumstances and when necessary or appropriate, I informed participants that due to the event of a perceived conflict or adverse event, they are no longer required to complete the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 is a significant portion of the overall pre-research preparational process, and provided research considerations which lays the foundation for the work in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 covered the research methodology and starts out by identifying the research design and tradition which is a purposive inductive design and a qualitative research tradition. The researcher's role and the participants are identified, as well as the interview

schedule. Next, an overview of research essentials was provided to include the coding

process, and various methods to ensure validity such as: credibility, dependability,

transferability, and triangulation.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of ethical procedures, treatment of human

participants, data collection and treatment of data, as well as what procedures to follow in

case of an adverse event. Lastly, Chapter 3 offered an in-depth look at the data analysis

aspect with the goals of ensuring that the study answers the research question, is in

alignment with the theoretical foundation, provides a working step by step process for data

coding and analysis which reveals the ultimate goal in producing a proposal product. In

Chapter 4, I will discuss the actual study details relating to the study setting,

demographics, data collection, data analysis, sources of validity and limitations of the

study, with additional aspects included as appropriate.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Transitioning can be thought of as movement to or from some place, a state of being, or development. It is a phenomenon that many parents may look forward to when thinking about their young adult children, as they reach their 18th or 19th birthday. Transitioning is a time to look toward movement away from the family home to college or independent living. Arnett (2016) argued that demographic, economic, and technological changes, as well as globalization, can extend young adults' transition to adulthood. In addition, the process of transitioning to adulthood has been exasperated in recent times by several compounding factors where many young adults are staying home a lot longer. These factors include an on-going, sociomedical environment with COVID-19, fewer job opportunities, and at-home schooling, largely at the higher levels of education.

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences, perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care, incarceration, and homeless out-of-home care base in their search for stable or permanent housing.

Research Question

The research question for this study was "What were the experiences, perceptions, and observations of life after transitioning from state care, leaving home, or an alternate out of home care base?" In order to answer this question, participants were asked about their transitioning experiences about new placements. First, participants were asked about their different placements and difficulties that they encountered. Second, I asked about

whether any family and social agencies were used. Third, they were queried about the extent of life skill training that they received. Finally, the participants shared information about their current living situations.

Setting

The study was conducted in a home-base-setting via telephone with responses audio recorded and later transcribed. The study was conducted in this manner for several reasons. First and most importantly, national and international communities were experiencing a potentially lethal world pandemic, COVID-19, an airborne, highly contagious, and often times fatal disease (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2021). Second, because of the pandemic, the population was required to wear masks or face coverings, restrict personal contact to immediate members within the household, and to practice socially distancing of at least 6 feet whenever outside of the home or at work (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

The requirements stopped any face-to-face contact that might have been available if the situation were different. Most social agency offices were closed or in lockdown status with essential workers only on site, and non-essential workers, working from home. This presented a problem with attempts to post study signage in the visible areas of an agency, and/or contact any potential respondents. In addition, because of the restriction on face-to-face contact, my ability to ascertain data on in-person behavioral dynamics of the interviewee were limited to audio impressions only.

Sample Size

In qualitative studies, the sample size is much smaller than those of quantitative reviews because they are focused on meaning, and do not use generalized hypotheses statements (Mason, 2010). Further, small samples are used in qualitative studies as saturation can occur early in the analysis process, revealing that larger samples do not necessarily mean more information (Mason, 2010). There were eight participants in this study and they were selected solely through a snowball sampling process. I had originally aimed for between 8 and 12 participants, but I had a difficult time recruiting participants. However, after all the data was compiled, and analyzed, I found that reached data saturation with eight participants. Snowballing is a technique that relies upon the word-of-mouth referral from one previous participant to another.

Demographics

The study demographics of the participants included three White females, two Black females, one Black male, one White male and one biracial male who identified as being White and Asian. Participant ages ranged from 21 to 24 years of age, with two members being 21 years of age and six members being 24 years of age. There were two individuals who reported intellectual disabilities, and two females who had children.

Data Collection

This study captured the experiences of eight young adults and their transitioning from a home base in search of stable or permanent housing, rooted in ecological theory, which examines the impact of experiences, systems, and processes on the developing individual. The participants were interviewed via telephone over the course of 12 weeks

starting in January 2021 and ending in March 2021. All interviews were conducted in the privacy of my home office and lasted 35 to 45 minutes. The data was recorded with an audio recording system that was set up near the telephone to capture the conversation. After the interview was over, the recorded data was transcribed to paper, based on the question order of the interview protocol instrument. The paper transcriptions were then put in matrix form for further analysis and review.

There were several variations in the data collection process in reality versus the plan, each implemented with the necessary IRB and/or program approvals. First, the initial data collection effort was intended to use signage postings in selected agencies to attract a diverse mix of individuals. However, with the onslaught of COVID-19, most of the agencies were closed to essential staff only, while those who were in the office were on lockdown with no outside contact.

Secondly, the data collection plan was adjusted to collect data from on-line sources such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and snowball sampling methods. However, when requests for participants were put on LinkedIn, and Facebook, I initially received over 75 hits of interests for the study. However, every hit turned out to be bogus in what looked like a 3-hour window of fake names possibly put online by a small group of individuals. Lastly, I then turned my attention to snowball sampling, which was most effective, although slow in coming and very time consuming.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, an interview protocol instrument was used that covered six primary questions, and eight secondary questions. The primary question's data

encapsulated an individual's personal experiences of transitioning to adulthood and included codes like total placements, difficulties faced, social agencies used, agency effectiveness, PAL program awareness, and homeless experiences. The secondary question set was grouped to reveal life skills training (informal and formal) that may or may not have been taught in areas that would prepare a young person's developmental growth and the ability to navigate independent living. Secondary questions codes included life skills learned or taught, vocational assessment, education achievement level, health and safety, social and personal relations, driving education, job preparedness, and current housing situation.

I scanned the questions from each transcript for frequency of experiences using Microsoft word search. The individual responses were then put in a matrix format and were grouped according to frequencies of each question asked and the response given. The responses were then analyzed to determine overall frequency numbers, percentages, identification of services used, and experience comments. Once grouped into categories, categories revealed overall themes.

Discrepant Cases

There were two discrepant cases, where the interviewees did not fully answer the questions. Both participants used four or more services, and they were asked about the effectiveness of the services used. Both individuals failed to speak directly about effectiveness on multiple services used but spoke about expectations of those services that were not received. One participant spoke about not getting psychological services, even though she related she did not share her desire or need to receive psychological services

with agency staff and stating her mistrust of the process. A second participant spoke on behavioral health services not helping him to secure a job, even though he was happy about the services he received. For instance, a male participant related:

> I used behavioral health outpatient support, rides to appointments, medication, and diagnosis of a mental health disorder. The services were not effective, they did not help with the roots of the problem, I needed a job that would pay more than minimal wage." (P #1)

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that credibility in qualitative research is accomplished in nine ways: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, (c) an audit trail, (d) disconfirming evidence, (e) prolonged engagement in the field, (f) the use of thick, rich descriptions, (g) researcher reflexivity, (h) collaboration, and (i) peer debriefing.

In this study, I used three options to include (a) member checking, (b) the use of thick, rich descriptions, (c) an audit trail, and (d) triangulation. First, member checking occurred when I asked participants to verify the information that they have shared with me in order to check for accuracy. Second, I analyzed data from transcribed participant interviews, researcher field notes, and my reflective journal to develop rich thick descriptions. Third, after transcribing the data, I developed data sets that not only provided an audit trail but enabled me able to use my data products to confirm triangulation.

Transferability

Moon et al. (2016) noted that transferability can be established by (a) the use of multiple participants with various backgrounds, (b) using experiences to derive rich, thick descriptions of their experiences, and (c) by triangulating data from multiple sources. In this study, I interviewed eight young adults with diverse backgrounds and varied transitional experiences. I was able to develop rich, thick descriptions based on their interview stories, and I used triangulating data from my data sets, my researchers notes and reflective appraisal of the project.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings, and it refers to the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Moon et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers should document research design and implementation, including methodology and methods, details of data collection via field notes, memos, the researcher's reflexivity journal, and reflective appraisal of the project (Moon et al., 2016). I documented the methodology and methods used, by using an interview protocol instrument, researcher's field notes and taped recordings, which I transcribed and used for triangulation. Lastly, I provided a reflective appraisal of the study via data sets to ensure an audit trail and dependability of the study for confirmation.

Confirmability

Odom et al. (2015) noted that coding documents can maintain confirmability to have an audit trail which helps to achieve confirmation. I ensured that my records were coded in

an efficient way so as to enable audit confirmation if necessary. I developed an audit trail in the following five top processes: (a) I made audio recordings of the interview protocol process with each participant, (b) I developed a transcription of each participant from the recorded interview protocol, (c) I developed a matrix table of the questions and responses from each participant, (d) I checked for frequency of responses using Microsoft word find, and (e) developed reflective tables per question to reveal highest frequencies, percentages, and themes on the collective whole.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a validity procedure through which researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Fusch & Ness (2015) and Denzin (2009) noted that triangulation involves using multiple external methods to collect data and the analysis of the data. To enhance objectivity, truth, and validity, Denzin categorized four types of triangulations for social research: (a) data triangulation for correlating people, time, and space; (b) investigator triangulation for correlating the findings from multiple researchers in a study; (c) theory triangulation for correlating multiple theoretical strategies; and (d) methodological triangulation for correlating data from multiple data collection methods. Triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories and overlapping areas (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I used data from transcribed participant interviews, researcher field notes, my reflective journal, and any themes resulting from my analysis to accomplish triangulation.

Researcher Reflexivity

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested that it is essential for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may shape their inquiry and to acknowledge biases early in the research process, and to bracket these biases as the research proceeds. In a comparative study, Neubauer et al. (2019) looked at Husserl's transcendental approach. Husserl's approach calls for the bracketing off of all previous understandings, knowledge, assumptions, scientific notions, claims by participants, as well as personal views and experiences of the researcher. This approach expects the researcher to become a blank slate that would allow the essence of the phenomenon to rest solely on responses of the participants (Neubauer et al. 2019).

I self-disclosed my assumptions, beliefs, and biases early in the research process due to my experience as a former program manager/child care administrator. I used a reflective journal to note any personal beliefs, values, and prejudice that I had as I progressed into the research process, and I bracketed or suppressed any feelings of bias, assumptions, or beliefs that I may have had during the process, as recommended by Neubauer et al. (2019). I accomplished bracketing by not responding to participant stories with commentary related to what was right, wrong, or inappropriate. Additionally, even though there was one participant who hinted at a history of criminal involvement, I allowed him to omit or leave out any details as he wished without pushing him for more information.

Results

In this section, I began with some background information on general participant demographics and background information. During the thematic analysis, five main themes emerged: (a) living on a couch or in a car is not homelessness; (b) the PAL program is not used or understood; (c) life skills, education, vocational training are lacking; (d) health, healthcare, and safety are not considerations; and (e) social relationships lack maturity and development. In the remaining pages and headings of this chapter, I explain these themes.

Participant Demographics and Background

Participant Age at First Transition

In general, the United States operates on the assumption that young adults reach the age of majority or legality between the ages of 18-21, with more opportunities, responsibilities, and expectations placed upon them to fit into societal norms (Arnett, 2016). In the case of the eight individuals interviewed, early transitioning (meaning stages of moving housing or location) ages varied and ranged from birth to 18 years of age. The age of each participant at first transition are as follows: (a) one participant was 3 days old, (b) one participant was 8 months of age, (c) one participant was 2 years of age, (d) two participants were 3 years old, (e) one participant was 6 years of age, (f) one participant was 11 years old, and (g) one participant was 18 years of age. See Table 1 with age of transition.

Table 1 *Age at First Transition*

Participant	Age
P1	3 days
P2	8 months
P3	2 years
P4	3 years
P5	3 years
P6	6 years
P7	11 years
P8	18 years

The transition age and following periods of developmental growth are important, as these movements indicate placement changes during the most formative of years of a child's life, (Hawk, 2020) and may impact not only their early childhood development but may change the trajectory of their lives as they enter young adulthood (Beutel, Tibubos, Klein, Schmutzer, Reiner, & Kocalevent, 2017). One female participant reported that: "I was given to my adopted parents 3 days after I was born." (P#2). While yet in another instance of transitioning on opposite poles, a male participant related: "I left at 18 years of age (from parent's home), life had been stable, but still shaky and people have to move out" (P#1).

Current Living Situation

Several years has passed since leaving out-of-home care for some of the participants, and finding housing has been challenging. The last questions had to do with their current living situations and if they had found stable housing. There were three instances of stable housing and five instances of unstable housing. The responses varied, with four instances of participants living in apartments, two instances of participants existing in transitional living situations, one instance of a participant living in a relative's home, and one instance of a participant that is currently homeless, living in a motel. While there were some participants who felt their living situation was stable, and some who admittedly felt that it was not, all these young adults have in common is a journey of experiences that has been all but stable.

Transitioning Movements/

Another aspect of transitioning involves movement. In the study, participants described their movement as from-and-to various placements often in the forms of involuntary requirements or as an act of defiance. Bender et al. (2015) revealed that youth who have aged out of care, soon resided with friends or relatives, of foster homes or other facilities such as shelters. In addition, Curry and Adams (2015) found that foster care young adults who aged out experienced a problematic transition to adulthood. These sudden and unpredictable movements can lead to high levels of insecurity and maturity delay. One male participant stated: "I was taken from my mother and sent to live with my grandmother…I was then sent to a boy's home for disturbed children" P#3. While in another instance, a female participant stated that: "I was 11 years old, and my dad came

home in a drunken rage…I was tired of him doing that, so I just packed a bag and I left…". P#4.

In both of these cases, movement away from the previous placements elicited feelings of abandonment, loss, disillusionment, and disappointment. A review of the frequencies of placements revealed, overall, there were fifty total placement changes among the participants. However, there were five types of placements that registered most frequently and included: (a) placements at residential treatment centers (15 instances primarily from one participant), (b) attempts to independence by moving into apartments (nine instances), (c) living with grandmothers (five instances), (d) foster care placements (4 instances), and (e) living in cars or living with an aunt produced (three instances).

Living with other relatives produced lower frequencies of occurrence. These are instances such as adoptive parents, biological male parent, or friends (two instances). Living with biological female parent, uncle, or boy's home ranked least frequent (one instance). For some participants, apartment living was difficult due to inability to maintain a budget, which resulted in high levels of instability and loss of apartment. One male participant reported:

> After I moved out of my friend's parent's house, I moved into an apartment with some male friends, one roommate was deported, and we could not afford the rent, so I moved in my girlfriend's apartment, we argued a lot, and I left… I moved in an apartment with my cousins, but they went to jail, so, I just stayed in my car. (P#1)

In addition, instances of living with foster care and grandmothers had high frequencies (5 instances) as well, and appeared to have provided some stabilization and unconditional love. One female participant related her transition experience as: "I stayed with my grandmother for 2 years, then I went to foster care for 1 year and then back to my grandmother for 5 years ..." P#5. In the experiences of these two participants, ecological theory's micro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) reveals how patterns of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations may have directly affected individual developmental growth and transitional journeys. There seems to be a common portrayal of codependence and reliance on others to survive.

Difficulties

Ferguson et al., (2014) revealed that the lifestyles of homeless young adults can be very precarious and can include risky behaviors such as criminal activities, involvement with deviant peers or substance abuses, and sexual deviancy in order to earn money. An analysis of the difficulties faced by the studies' participants also revealed issues of concern. Two participants reported they developed an alcohol or substance addiction, and one participant spoke of a legal issue where he stated he "violated his probation, which resulted in him being sent to a boy's home". P#3. (This male participant did not feel comfortable to discuss his legal issues in detail). Although the numbers seem small, the matter at hand reveals immaturity, lack of coping skills, and the inability to understand how to handle a life of uncertainty and turmoil.

Social Agencies Used

Young adults transitioning, has shown vulnerabilities that reveal the need for assistance. In the case of these study participants, frequency of instances of support revealed that all participants were able to access social agency programs that provided much needed support. Medicaid had the highest frequency instances with seven participants receiving services through the various programs that they accessed. The Foster Care Program had the next highest frequency of intervention with four or 50% of participants stating that they were in the system, albeit. for short periods of time. In addition, 50% of young adults in this study utilized transitional housing in the forms of residential treatment centers, group housing, and sober house options. Smaller numbers of participants reported they received support through the channels of: young adult programs, Social Security disability, food stamps, behavioral and medical health services.

Now that I have described a general background of who my study participants were and the general experiences of becoming homeless and use of services, I will move on to themes that answer my research question. As I described above, five themes emerged to answer the question: What were the experiences, perceptions, and observations of life after transitioning from state care, leaving home, or an alternate out of home care base?

Theme 1: Living on a Couch or in a Car is Not Homelessness

There have been many studies that have found that young adults transitioning from an out-of-care base have experienced many difficulties including homelessness.

Winetrobe, et al. (2017) found, in their study of 444 homeless young adults attending LA One (a drop-in shelter), that 52% of the sample who identified as being homeless were black and had a history of injecting drugs. Morton et al. (2017), noted that homeless young adults, nationally, were estimated at 26,000 young adults with one in ten young adults identified with sleeping in the streets, or in shelters, running away, or having been kicked out of their homes and reduced to couch surfing.

In the case of the eight study participants, four or 50% reported that they had an episode of homelessness. Three participants lived in cars, and one participant couch surfed with friends when her father kicked her out of the home. The other 50% of the participants stated that they were never homeless, but had lived temporarily with relatives, in foster care placements, or residential treatment centers. One male participant who identified as homeless related: "Yes, I have been homeless before, I lived in a car with my mother for two months, but we never lived on the streets with like boxes…" P#3. Another participant reported that: "I went to stay with my dad…he kicked me out every time he was drunk…I would stay at one of my friend's houses until he called and told me to come back…" P#4. A third participant noted that "I have been in fifteen placements because they did not know what to do with me" P#5.

Child Trends (2015) data bank identified unaccompanied youths as children and youths who were homeless and on their own (i.e., not living with their families). It appears that while all the study participants were at some point homeless or living in transitional or temporary situations, they either denied, failed to recognize, or did not construe themselves as homeless as long as they had a place to go.

This is an interesting finding in that what it takes to understand and acknowledge homelessness is not necessarily shared or universal. This ties into social and personal relationships and health and safety life skills. In the case of the male participant, the issue here is dealing with social norms and how one is presented and perceived by society. In the case of the female participant, being kicked out of the home presented with danger to her health and safety by having to find a safe place to go in a crisis.

This also ties into under development of informal life skills as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) as the abilities for adoptive positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Some of the primary attributes includes problem solving, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, and coping with emotions and stress,

Theme 2: The PAL Program is not Used or Understood, but Some Services are Used

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program (DFPS, 2017) was established in 1986 to ensure that older youths in substitute care are prepared for their transition from The Department of Family and Protective Service program (DFPS). The PAL program is specifically designed for young adults who are in active foster +++++++++++++++care and who are due to transition out on their 18th birthday. The PAL program is started when youths are 16 years of age or older, and they are likely to remain in care up to the age of 18 and may qualify for services up to their 21st birthday. Participants will receive PAL services only if they are actively in the program, at or near their leave from care (DFPS, 2017).

Some young adults, who have had episodic or brief stays in foster care, may not be qualified to reap the full benefits of the PAL program. That may be the reason why 100% of the individuals that I interviewed reported that they did not know of, or never had any experience with the PAL program even though 50% had received services through the foster care program at some point in their transition history. However, these individuals would not qualify for the PAL program because they were not under State care when they were 16 to 18 years of age.

In the study, all participants stated they utilized some form of agency support, with an assortment of two to five services used. When participants were asked about the effectiveness of these services, responses varied with five individuals reporting that the services they received were effective, and three reporting they were not effective. The three participants who stated their support was ineffective provided further insight stating the following: One female participant stated: "I visited programs for people out on their own, and troubled women classes, but I did not embrace them. It was good to talk to staff, but when I went home, everything was the same." P#6. While one male participant used behavioral health outpatient support, rides to appointments, and received medications for a mental health diagnosis, he related: "The services were not really effective, they did not help me with the roots of the problem. What I needed was a job that paid more than minimal wage…" P#1.

Lastly, a second male participant who used the Foster Care program support services, psychiatric and counseling services, and food stamps noted: "I did not think the

services were effective because the counselor did not believe the abuse, we received from our parent…" P#7.

In review of perceptions of program effectiveness, those who deemed services ineffective did not reflect on the services they received, but on their perceptions of what was not received. There was no consideration for the need or requirement for self-application, or a grasp of what the agency's service provision actually encompassed. In the case of P#1, life skill knowledge on education achievement would have been instrumental in helping him to see the big picture in how education is tied to employment and even more so to higher education in helping him to a find a job with higher, or better pay. Regarding P#7, life skills training in health and safety would have been beneficial in that the participant would have been more aware of the service provision he received was more in line with avoiding abuse in the future.

Theme 3: Life Skills, Education, Vocational Training are Lacking

One of the main focuses here was the use and acquisition of life skills. I saw a trend in that most types of formal skills training were lacking among participants. Most types of skills, in general, among these participants seemed to have learned out of necessity and/or through informal means. Under this theme, I discuss multiple types of life skills, informal and formal, and participants' relationship to and preparation regarding these skills.

Informal Life Skills

Life skills were considered in two realms, informal and formal. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) defines Life Skills as "the abilities for adaptive and positive

behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life." Following the study of many different life skills programs, the WHO Department of Mental Health identified five basic areas of life skills that are relevant across cultures: 1) decision-making and problem-solving; 2) creative thinking and critical thinking; 3) communication and interpersonal skills; 4) self-awareness and empathy; and 5) coping with emotions and coping with stress.

For the participants, five instances (or 62%) related that they were self-taught in learning about informal skills. The additional three participants stated they were taught by mom (two instances) or grandmother (one instance). While much can be said about how one learns basic informal skills and the teaching of same, children tend to live what they learn. For one male participant, he describes his early home life as follows:
"We had a trashy house…I jumped in to take care of my family as mom was sick, and when mom was out, I shopped, trial and error, I asked neighbors… I literally became the parent taking care of my mother and sister." (P#7). In another situation, a female participant who was kicked out of the house by her alcoholic father noted:

"I went to my friends' house and stayed there until he called me to come back"

P#5.

In the first situation, a major role reversal from child to parent takes hold, leaving the young person to be the adult, and learning responsibility through being thrust into a role, that was not necessarily taught. In the second situation, the role reversal occurred when the father put this participant in an extremely unsafe, and confusing position which called

for a role reversal to act like an adult when out of the home, and assume the child role upon return.

In terms of informal life skills, participants tended to describe that they learned by doing out of need, and determination, where these skills were either modeled by others and copied, or participants were forced to take action on their own.

Formal Life Skills: Vocation and Education

Vocational assessments are designed to assess a person's strengths, abilities, aptitude, and weaknesses in various areas. Study participants were asked if they had a vocational aptitude test in relation to preparation for college. Within the sample group, four reported that they had some form of vocational assessment or help with SAT testing. Two participants noted that they received help while transitioning out of high school, while two others reported that their parents assisted them. However, three participants related that they did not receive help, and either did not see themselves going to college or did not have the desire or aptitude to attend college. One female participant noted: "I don't remember taking any assessments, I just signed up for a class and took it." P#4. A male participant responding to the same question stated:

> I got my high school diploma. Originally, I was not going to pass, but I worked
> hard enough to pass. I was never a scholarly person, I never got any offers like
> that, but I also did not want to go to college. (P#3)

The last participant stated that she did not get a vocational assessment, however, she noted the following:

I used to read my horoscope in the morning and it would tell me a lot about my personality. That is how I knew what kind of skills I had…even though they say it's fictional, I learned a lot about myself. (P#5)

Educational Training

Education is a very important part of transitioning to independent living and adulthood. Without a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED), the lack of either will grossly impact upon one's ability to become employed or to further one's education. In the case of my sample, across participants, there were eight instances where they had received their high school diplomas. In addition, two participants reported completion of one and a half years of community college and one participant reported three years of completion in a four-year college. Considering the tribulations that these young adults endured, to place high importance on education is a great accomplishment. Without the knowledge of being taught ideals, and principles on so many levels throughout the study, completing their high school education, and some higher-level education as well, is a great plus for a   The Annie E. Casey foundation's Kids Count Data Center reported a similar pro-education trend from 2000 to 2018. The share of 16-to-19-year-olds who were not high school students or high school graduates, dropped from 11% to 4%. Additionally, the share of 18-to-24-year-olds who were college students or college graduates rose from 36% to 40% (Casey, 2020)

Finances and Budgeting Skills

Finances and budgeting are another important aspect of independent living, as without this knowledge, one cannot maneuver the intricacies of day-to-day living.

Finances are akin to income or money coming in, while budgeting is the management of that income, how it is used and disbursed and to whom or to what. In this study, there were seven instances of young adults confirming that they were not taught the importance of knowing about finances or income, or how to budget or manage same. There was one participant who acknowledged being taught who related: "I think my dad was more helpful in teaching me about finances" (P#2).

Finance and budgeting appear to be one of the major needs for young adults to learn, as it permeates every business and is needed in the home by ensuring that revenues meet life expenses. It is small wonder how there were nine instances of young adults trying to live independently in apartments, but failing to do so. One female participant stated: "after being in my apartment, I would go and spend to make myself feel better. I ended up losing my apartment, and I moved back in with my aunt". P#6

Another participant, a 24-year-old male, when asked if he was taught about finance and budgeting related:

> I am currently learning about businesses, spreading out to people who have money. A few books, the sidewalk, no point in life. No nine to five job, slow lane, particular people nine to five, who work hard are generating millions of dollars in six to seven years, people who help each other... (P#1)

This participant's response appears as if there was no prior exposure or teaching of finances and budgeting, and engagement in wishful thinking and reflections on the progress of others.

In learning about housing principles, individuals need to know simple, basic information. Most young adults who transition out of the home setting may choose to attend college, and usually start with moving into a dorm room, or an apartment. Young adults may choose to live alone or to share the rent and utilities with others, depending on their budget and preference. However, when deciding upon a home or apartment, there are several basic principles that come into play and should be discussed with young adults. These principles include: employment, income, debt, affordability, availability, accessibility, and location. Other higher order factors may include: utility costs, leasing, contracts, security deposits, and maintenance fees.

Study participants were asked were asked if they were taught about housing principals as listed above. There were seven instances where respondents stated they were not taught and one instance of a participant that was taught. Taught means exposure to what it would take to move and live independently outside of the home or care base, and discussion of some of the principles as listed above. Respondents discussed how they found searching for housing very difficult after leaving supervised care. One participant stated: "No one talked to me about housing. I never looked into any apartments". P#8. Another participant noted: "I never thought help for housing was possible. I applied before but it was not easy, I was on a waiting list, but they never called." P#1. Being taught or exposed to housing principles are very important, as it broadens the realization of what is actually needed in movement toward independent living.

Driver Education Training

A significant skill toward independent living, is completing driver's education, learning how to drive and possessing a valid driver's license. While driving provides the means to get to most places locally, it also allows a person to move about in large states that not only have big cities, but major rural areas as well. There are other benefits to being a holder of a driver's license, most importantly, a driver license also doubles as an identification card and helps with identification for voting, purchasing an automobile, insurance or renting a car. Lastly, a driver's license may be needed to not only get a job, but to keep a job.

In review of the study participant's (n=8) responses, there were four instances where participants noted that they had been taught to drive, and one instance where a participant stated "she taught herself to drive…" P#5. In addition, there were three instances of those participants who were not taught to drive, and currently they do not drive. Not learning how to drive puts individuals at risk of not being able to transport themselves independently, they lose the ability to acquire identification that can help in so many other areas of their lives, and it sets them back in relation to co-dependency on others or public transportation.

Theme 4: Health, Healthcare, and Safety are not Considerations

Health and safety education is also an important aspect of transitioning to adulthood. In this era of socio-environmental medical concerns, it is vital to be aware of health and safety issues, as well as to have access to health care. Study participants were questioned on if they were informed about accessing the health care system and if they knew how to keep up with health cards and prescriptions. The majority, or six participants

indicated that they were not informed of how to access the health care system. There were seven instances where participants received assistance through relatives or caretakers, while one participant stated he did not know about health care access until he was ill and went to the hospital, and was asked what type of insurance he had. After leaving care, two female participants did not learn about health care until they became pregnant. One female participant noted the following: "I was around six months pregnant and I looked up family services. I am having a child and I did not know how to parent a child." P#6   A second female participant related her experience as follows:

> No one taught me about medical stuff, I just had a Medicaid Card…but I did not
> know how to use it. When I was in an RTC, I had medications; I took them when
> they gave them to me. I learned about insurance after I got pregnant. (P#3)

In the case of these young mothers, accessing the health care system during the early months of pregnancy was vital, putting both the health of the mother and fetus at risk. In the case of the group overall, frequency of instances revealed that none of the participants had been taught or learned the responsibility of self-care when it comes to knowledge about health and safety. Basic issues such as learning about health and safety is fundamental and should be taught, directly, or role modeled. Young adults need to know that some forms of insurance have a cost, or they need to know how to apply for government assistance.

Information about health and safety should not learned by trial and error or serendipitously such as in the case of P#5 who stated "he learned he needed health insurance when ill and checking into the hospital". Another case in point was P#6 who

stated "she made contact with health services when she was six months pregnant". In the case of both participants, it was either too late to acquire insurance or to get early trimester prenatal care.

Theme 5: Social and Personal Relationships Lack Maturity and Development

Social and personal relationships are important skills to master, whereas a civil society as a whole, depends on the interactions of individuals to accomplish goals, get needs met, or simply to communicate one's understanding in a matter. In the case of the eight study participants, there were five instances where individuals stated they had not been taught about social and personal relationships and three instances of participants who had admitted they had been taught. Two females within the three participants who had been taught, noted that they were taught by relatives (mother and grandmother), and one male who stated: "Like growing up, I learned about ethical and moral things, a little bit from everyone. If you do something wrong, everyone will come at you" (P#3). One of the participants who stated she was not taught about social and personal relationships, related: "I learned about social relationships on my own. I don't hang around many people, either you like me or you don't" (P#4).

In the case of social and personal relationships, it is hard to tell if one was taught or not, as teaching can come in many forms, as an ethic or moral lesson, or how to behave in school, or simply how to treat one's sibling. All of these lessons are customs of being taught, the right and wrong way to interact within social and personal contexts. Maybe these participants were too focused on looking through the lens of disappointment, disillusion, and anger, to grasp the lesson. Additionally, in the case of the latter

participant, she has learned to be distant, and one who guards her feelings toward those who may or may not like her.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I have worked through the lives of eight individuals who were willing to share their experiences and transitions to independent living. Chapter 4 is divided into four major sections: the study setting, data analysis, results and summary. There were two main categories of analysis which includes a primary data set and a secondary data set. The primary data set lays the foundation of the young adult, by looking at the beginning of each participant's transitional journey, starting with the first age of transition, the types of placements, difficulties encountered, social services used, and the effectiveness of those services. In addition, respondents provided information on whether they were familiar with the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, or had a homeless experience.

In the second data set, life skills were reviewed and if participants were or were not taught about certain subjects. These subjects included: health and safety, social and personal relations, finance and budgeting, driving skills attainment, housing information and employment. Lastly, participants provide information about their current housing status. Respondents revealed that at least 50 placements were experienced, and the difficulties encountered ranged from being alone, beatings while in some placements, alcohol and substance addictions, and feelings of being unloved. In addition, participants acknowledged that many social services were used, with five instances of positive effectiveness.

When asked about the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, n=8, all of the participants stated they had not heard of or did not know of this program, even though four or 50 percent of them had been in the foster care system. Furthermore, four or 50 percent of participants also stated that they had experienced a homeless episode, there were three instances of participants living in their cars, and one instance of a participant who is currently homeless, living in a motel. There were five topics of importance that respondents related they had not been taught or given sufficient information on which included: health and safety, social and personal relations, finances and budgeting, driving skills attainment and information on housing. Lastly, participants were asked about their current living status in the lens of stable or unstable.

This study has demonstrated that young adults still face many adversities in navigating independent living, but they have done so with resilience and determination to get to a state of independence and stable housing. In all but one instance, their lives have been filled with insecurity, uncertainty, and disillusionment on adulthood and independent living. As I transition to Chapter 5, I will be looking to provide interpretations, limitations, recommendations, and implications of the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and observations of young adults after transitioning from state care, incarceration, and homeless out-of-home care base in their search for stable or permanent housing. The PAL program provides a broad spectrum of pre- and post-care transition supports provided under a core umbrella of three basic tenants: life skills assessments, training, and post-case management support (DFPS, 2015). In addition, the 2017 Single Point in Time Homeless counts (HUD, 2017) identified 41,000 individuals as unaccompanied youth (those without parents) in the homeless ranks in the United States. In the case of these young adults, the study looked at their lived experiences and. if they were taught life skills that assisted them in finding stable or permanent housing.

I conducted this study with a three main goals: (a) understand the experiences of young adults who had transitioned from state care or another out of home care base ; (b) understand if and how they were taught life skills to help their journey and movement toward stable and or permanent housing; and (c) contribute to the current research, professional practice, and social change. Five main themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Living on a Couch or in a Car is Not Homelessness
- Theme 2: The PAL Program is not Used or Understood, but Some Services are Used
- Theme 3: Life Skills, Education, Vocational Training are Lacking
- Theme 4: Health, Healthcare, and Safety are not Considerations

- Theme 5: Social and Personal Relationships Lack Maturity and Development

Findings

Positive Attributes

There were several positive attributes to the young adults in the study. First, all the participants were all high school graduates, with three participants who was in the process of completing one-to-three years of college. The Anne E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data (2018) reported the share of 16-to-19-year old's who were not high school students or high school graduates dropped from 11% to 4%. At the same time, the share of 18 to 24-year old's who were college students or college graduates increased from 39% to 40%.

Second, seven of the eight participants held jobs, even though they were minimum wage positions. This is also in line with studies by Dworsky and Gitlow (2017), Curry and Adams (2015) and Ferguson, et.al., (2018) who found that young adults suffered from low rates of employment, unstable work histories, and earnings that are often less than the poverty threshold of a single adult.

Third, while one of the most critical needs for young adults in this study, is housing assistance, 50% (4) of the participants related they were presently living in stable housing situations. Currently, there are multiple options for young adults seeking housing assistance to including: The Family Unification Program (FUP), and Section 8 voucher system which was developed by HUD (2016) to assists young adults 18-21 years of age. The Independent Living Program (ILP) helps young adults address homelessness by providing instruction services on job readiness and retention, nutrition and housekeeping, transitional housing and assistance with completing high school and attending college

(Curry & Abrams, 2015). Two additional programs that are in place to help young adults facing homelessness, are The Rapid Rehousing Model for Youth, is a program designed to assist youth in obtaining and retaining supportive housing, move-in assistance, providing supportive relationships, and case management (National Alliance to End Homelessness (2021) The Youth Homeless Demonstration Program, is a program designed to end youth homelessness by working with community leaders and resources to provide a community coordinated services approach (HUD Exchange, 2018).

Adverse Attributes

Past studies (e.g., Bender et al., 2015; Curry & Adams, 2015; Dion et al., 2014; Dworsky & Gitlow, 2017; Ferguson et al., 2018; Finer & Zolina, 2016; Mitchel et al., 2015; Toolis & Hammack, 2015) have all shown the many adversities of young adults transitioning from care. As my study progressed, some of the same adversities such as multiple transitions, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics such as, being kicked out of home by parent, and episodic homelessness appeared in the experiences of these young adult participants. It has been well confirmed that young adults are not prepared and remain at risk for vulnerabilities in many areas (see citation). Some of the major issues with young adult participants in this study was that they continue to be unprepared for independent living due to no or inadequate key information in primary areas. These areas included budgeting and finance, social and personal relationships, housing acquisition, and driving skill attainment.

Often, young adults are put into situations where their maturity and understanding are limited such as one male participant whose role was reversed to parent when he found

himself taking care of his sick mom and little sister P#7. Or, in the case of a female participant who did not get prenatal care until she was 6 months pregnant and stated she did not know anything about being a parent. In addition, 50% of the participants related they had experienced an episode of homeless in the past and were currently living in unstable housing situations, with one participant currently in a homeless situation.

Study Extension

This study is an extension of prior studies that analyzed the movements of young adults seeking independent living after leaving a foster care or other home care base. However, there is a difference in that in this study I looked primarily at young adults who may not have transferred directly from a foster care setting, with the intent of shedding additional light of the plight of those young adults who are also trying to find their way, without the benefits of the foster care system or other social supports.

Findings Analysis

The finding analysis confirmed what many studies before it had reported, that young adults remain vulnerable and unprepared for independent living (e.g., Bender, et al,2015; Curry & Abrams, 2015; Morton, Dworsky & Samuels, 2017). Additionally, even in the light of multiple programs and social service provisions, the population of 18-24-year-old young adults continue with many needs, supports, and assistance to navigate their new independence. Lastly, while most of the participants did receive support from various agencies, there were some social service agencies unable to meet the needs, due to the overwhelming rise in the population at risk.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation is that of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological theory as it considers the developing human and the surrounding influences that they may have encountered in the process of finding stable or permanent housing. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has two proposition and five subsystems.

The first major proposition is that human development takes place through progressively moral complex interactions between the environment and the persons, objects, and how it symbolizes it in its immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The second major proposition states that the form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person and the environment, both immediate and remote (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The five subsystems are (a) microsystem, (b) meso-system, (c) exo-system, (d) macrosystem and, (e) chrono-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the focus was on the micro-, macro-, and chrono-systems, which provided for a directed beginning, middle, and end in the phases of young adults maturing and transitioning in and out of various lifestyle situations.

Rosa and Tuledge, (2013) defined the microsystem as the most proximal setting, with particular physical characteristics, in which a person is situated (such the home, child care, playground, and place of work), in which the developing person can interact in a face-to-face way with others. This is the sitting which activities and interpersonal roles and relations engaged in overtime, are the constitutional elements. The macrosystem, as

defined by Rosa and Tuledge (2013) indicated that this system differs from the other levels of context, by embracing the institutional systems of a culture or subculture such as the economic, social, educational, legal and political systems. Lastly, the chrono-system is defined as a final system parameter that extends the environment into a third dimension, and encompasses changes in consistency over time in the characteristics of the person, and the environment in which that person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Results and the Theoretical Framework

Proposition 1

In the first proposition, the individual is continually developing, I saw each of these young adults in the study within the context of aging and time of first placements. This is important as the ages at time of first transition included: 3 days old, 8 months old, 2 years old, two 3 years old, 6 years old, 11 years old, and 18 years of age. The ages show that these young adults had been on the path of development through the infant, adolescent, early teens, and young adult years, while going through various placements and problems.

Proposition 2

Proposition 2 looks at how the people, processes, and programs affect their growth and direction. For each participant, there has been many people, processes and programs that have affected their development and growth (citation). Each young adult in the study was involved in the social service systems, although for short durations in time. There were four instances of young adults going through the foster care system, with each accessing Medicaid, medical and behavioral health systems. Some of the participants had

experiences through special agencies such as adoption services, residential treatment

centers, or group homes.

The Microsystem

The microsystem concerns the pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal

relationships that surround the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The results of the study

showed there were many challenges endured by study participants who were moving

within the microsystem. The sample size of this group was eight participants, however,

there were 50 different total placements among the group, where first placement

transitions ranged from the age of 3 days old to 18 years of age. Due to parental and

family dynamic dysfunction, study participants experienced multiple transitions, and role

changes, either, within the family from child-to-parent, and child-to-adult roles in some

cases. Relationship challenges came while living outside the home as adults when living

with relatives and friends, which called for greater levels of maturity, where it may not

have existed and when participants were most vulnerable.

The Macrosystem

The macrosystem embraces the institutional systems of a culture or subculture

such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems (citation). The

macrosystem, in context of the study participants, includes participation in the culture of

seeking beneficial social service help from agencies, educational systems attended, and

legal settings pertaining to placement decisions made on their behalf. Additionally,

participants sought agency support from systems such as Medicaid, Social Security

Disability, behavioral and medical health systems. Lastly, some participants sought

assistance from RTC's, group homes, sober houses and support groups targeting young adults and women's groups.

The Chrono System

The chrono-system consists of the overreaching effects of the micro-, meso-, macro- and exo-systems, and the culture or subculture with which the individual identifies (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The chrono-system includes customs, structures, opportunities, and life course options over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theory relates to individuals being influenced directly and in-directly while accessing the systems, and programs when trying to meet their needs. The chrono-system focuses directly upon the totality of the individual's experiences and the life course options that she or he has used to become successful in seeking not only overall support assistance, but housing assistance as well over time.

In the case of the study participants, all revealed the type of culture or racial makeup that they identified with to include: one African-American male, two African-American females, three Anglo females, one Anglo male, and one bi-racial (Anglo/Asian) male. For those participants who were African-American, family support appeared to be a big link for most of their placements and assistance, as they were more prone to stay primarily with relatives and friends. In the case of the Anglo-American female participants, there were multiple transitions through agencies such as adoption agencies, foster care, and residential treatment centers. In the case of the Anglo male participant, he too, found support with family and group home assistance, while the bi-racial male participant, found assistance in family, foster care, and supportive neighbors.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study included a small sample size, and the inability to generalize to a larger population, snowball sampling, limits of what participants were willing to share, and the limitations imposed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of the study. Mason (2010) stated that with qualitative studies, the sample size is much smaller than those of qualitative reviews because they are focused on meaning, and do not use generalized hypotheses statements. In the case of this study, with the small sample size n = 8, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population as the study focuses on the individual life experiences of each person.

A second limitation of the study included the participant selection. The participant selection method of snowball sampling was intended to be used as a secondary source for this study. The first intent was to use postings at agencies that worked with the desired population and social media outreach. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, many agencies were open to essential personal only, with no inside privileges of agencies from non-essential individuals. Therefore, snowball sampling became the best choice for continuation of the study. Additionally, aims at using social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn rendered efforts useless due to insincerity of respondents.

A third limitation centered upon what participants were willing to share. Although all of the participants in the study appeared to have shared a great deal of their experiences, however, there were occasions where it did not seem as if all participants were willing to share the full story of their issues. For instance, one of the male participants stated that he "had to go to a boy's home because he violated his probation"

P#6. However, he did not voluntarily divulge any further information regarding why he was on probation, albeit alluding to some legal problem he may have experienced.

Lastly, the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which would not allow for face-to-face communication, made it difficult for the researcher to capture body emotions and reactions to questions asked. All communication was done via telephone and recorded interviews.

Recommendations

In studying the experiences of young adults and their difficulties, the recommendations are as follows:

1. That more outreach be done starting in group homes, and children's homes were there may be non-foster care young adults preparing for discharge without family to return to. Other targets could include high schools, local clinics, churches, recreation centers, and on streets in locations where homeless young adults congregate or can be located.

2. That similar PAL program look-a-likes be developed locally in strategic areas of the city, and promoted with similar program benefits to be offered to all young adults in need. Programs were transitional housing and housing vouchers can be made available after successful completion of the program.

3. That young adults be taught within these new programs, life skills they lack which would help them to become successfully independent. Teaching in the areas of coping skills, problem solving, positive social interaction, finance, budgeting,

housing legalities, and reality-based planning for the future to assist in individuals becoming self-sufficient, and productive citizens.

4. That an employment element be included to help young adults find jobs or train-to-target entry level jobs that are or may be facing major shortages in the future, but still in demand such as nursing aides, teaching assistants, growth in restaurant services, etc.

5. The inclusion of non-foster care young adults facing severe or chronic homelessness with the goal of inducing parity of benefits for both foster care alumni, and those who are not in the foster care program, but who may have the same needs.

Implications

There are many implications to the recommendations as stated above, which would be requirements for any newly created or enhanced benefit programs to include: additional funding which would be needed to enhance established programs and/or creation of new programs. Funding would be needed to keep up with the demanding pace of young adults coming of age and transitioning from care. In keeping up with program maintenance and program development, there will also be the need to increase outreach and advertisement.

As more programs are available, there would also be the need to incorporate, expand upon, or trim down means testing protocols, waiting lists, and screening of individuals who may not be fully committed to the programs. There would need to be some form of special consideration protocol on how to address individuals with mental and physical health issues that may need to be addressed, prior to their starting any new

programs. Lastly, program guidelines would need to be developed that would include quality indicators and best practices of efficiency to ensure that goals and objectives are meeting the needs of the participants.

Potential Impact on Positive Social Change

By establishing new laws, programs and interventions to help this population, the positive social change is that more young adults can have social supports, if taken advantage of, that allows them the opportunity to grow and mature in ways to help nurture self-worth and independence.

Although 50 % (4) of the study had passed through the state foster care program, over 100% (8) stated that they had neither heard of the PAL program or were not informed of the PAL program existence. While it would be impossible to provide assistance for all the young adults in need, participants who had been in the foster care program, even for a limited time, should qualify for some of the options, opportunities, and benefits as foster care alumni.

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

Methodologically, the most important implication from this process, is the one concerning recruiting a participant sample by snowball sampling only, and the inability to set across from each participant while asking questions. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to see my participants or capture any body movements, facial expressions or inflictions that would indicate distress, discomfort or fabrication.

Theoretically, the implication from using ecological systems theory, was that it was very appropriate for this study, and for this group of participants, as it provided a multidimensional lens to view logical angles of perception on participant experiences.

Empirically, between the methodology and theory, this was the best and only way that this study could have been completed-

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research should consists of:

1) On-going research in the areas of family dynamics, young adults in transition, homelessness and the ease or complexity of securing stable or permanent housing,

2) Researchers need to continue to study this population to keep awareness of the progress, or lack of, in the forefront of policy makers, agencies and society as a whole, so that more can be done to protect and empower young adults who may become parents and future tax payers.

Recommendations for Practice

Here is what disciplines, agency directors, and researchers may likely need to continue to do:

1. Continue to provide outreach to all young adults in the community who present a need for assistance.

2. Develop new legislation, and funding supports directly tied to the establishment of new programs or enhancements of already established programs.

3. Develop parity of benefits for both foster care alumni and for young adults

in need who were, but are not currently in the foster care system, where more

young adults in need can be included in preparation for a brighter future.

4. Continue with strong community awareness by promotion via all manner of media
    to include: television, radio, bill board advertisements and social media, where young
    adults can continue to learn how to access those programs that provide valuable
    resources.

Conclusions

These young adults have overcome childhood transitions, disappointments, and

challenges to become the young adults they are today. All of the participants graduated

high school and some college, which is a great stepping-stone to access better

opportunities, and better future income. In addition, these young adults may not be in the

best place at this time, but they may be in a smarter place with the ability to make

decisions for themselves and the knowledge on how to seek help if needed. Lastly, while

there were many adversities in the lives of these participants, they have learned how to

keep moving forward in search of better days.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

You are invited to participate in a research study about your transition experience from an out of home placement, and how life skills training may have helped you on your journey to acquire stable or permanent housing.

Purpose: Explore the experiences of young adults who have transitioned out of care and their journey in securing stable or permanent housing.

Eligibility: Participants must have the following to be eligible:
-If you are 18 to 24 years of age,
-was in foster care, homeless, or other out-of- home care placement
-emancipated within the last four years
-attended life skills training (optional) and,
-is in or working toward permanent housing.

Participation: Young adults will be asked to participate in a face-to-face one-hour interview.
Those who participate will receive a $15.00 gift card for their time.

Benefits: The study may help bring awareness to social services personal and policy makers on the current perceptions of young adults and the effectiveness of housing services and life skills training for this population.

:
If you are interested in joining the study, please contact Linda Ross

Appendix B: Study Overview

Description of the Study

As more young adults leave out-of-home placements, more services and supports will be

needed to address a growing population. This study explores not only young adults who

have left foster care but those that leave other out-of-home placements to determine a

broad perception of those impacted in their search for stable or permanent housing,

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of young adults

who have transitioned in the past 4 years on their journey to secure stable or permanent

housing.

Procedures

Participants will take part in an open-ended semi structured interview. Each participant

will be interviewed for a 1-hour time period**.**

Appendix C: Definition of Terms

Out-of-home Placement

For the purpose of this study an *out-of-home placement* can be defined as any home-like placement which is not the primary biological home to include: foster care, relative or friend's home care, transitional housing, young adult shelter, group home, half-way house, correctional facility, homeless shelter, car, abandoned building, or any out-of-door arrangement.

Life Skills

For the purpose of this study *life skills* will be defined as those provided through the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program which includes training in health and safety, housing and transportation, job readiness, life decisions and responsibility, and personal and social relations.

Agency Service Supports

For the purpose of this study *agency service support* can be defined as services such as health care, housing support via the Family Unification Program, transitional housing, Section 8. Case management, personal or substance abuse counseling, probation or educational support.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

I am interested in hearing about your experiences, perceptions, and observations of life after transitioning from state care, leaving home, homelessness, or an alternate out of home care base. I will ask some questions but you can also tell me your story in your own way.

QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS			RESEARCHER NOTES
1	**How was your life after transition from care?**		
	1a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What year did you start your transition from care?	
	1b	POTENTIAL PROMPT: When did the transition end for you?	
	1c	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What types of out-of-home care placements did you experience?	
	1d	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Do you know about how much time you spent at each placement?	
	1e	POTENTIAL PROMPT: How many placements did you experience before transitioning?	
	1f	POTENTIAL PROMPT: How many after transitioning?	
2	**What types of difficulties did you experience during your transition?**		
	2a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Can you tell me more about that?	
3	**Was there anything you found <u>most</u> difficult during transition?**		
	3a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Can you tell me more about how you handled that?	
4	**Tell me about any homeless experiences you may have had.**		

	4a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What was that like?	
5		**What types of social agency support services did you use?**	
	5a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Was there anything else?	
6		**When you think back to that time, how effective were the services you used?**	
	6a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Did that service help you meet your transitional needs?	
7		**Some people use the PAL Program transitional living supports. Do you remember anything about PAL?**	
	7a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What did you think about the PAL Programs?	
8		**I would like to hear your thoughts about life skills, both the ones you learned on your own and those that you received training on. Let's start with the skills you learned on your own. Can you tell me about those?**	
	8a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Do you remember what made you want to learn that skill?	
	8b	POTENTIAL PROMPT: How did you go about learning that?	
9		**How about any trainings for life skills? Maybe taking a class or lessons?**	
	9a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Can you tell me more about that?	
	9b	POTENTIAL PROMPT: One kind of support is called Vocational Assessment & Training. That could be making an inventory of your abilities or skills. What kind of training like that did you receive?	
	9c	POTENTIAL PROMPT: How about education support? Maybe for the GED?	

	9d	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Any preparation for college exams?	
	9e	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What kind of training for driver education or help preparing for paper testing for a driver's license?	
	9f	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Tell me about any training you have had on health and safety. Examples could be learning about medical insurance paperwork or keeping up with medical cards, records, and medications.	
	9g	POTENTIAL PROMPT: What kind of training did you receive in budgeting or finance management, such as taking care of bills?	
	9h	POTENTIAL PROMPT: How about training on personal and social relationships?	
10		**Support can also come in the form of one-on-one conversation. What can you tell me about your experiences in receiving help that way?**	
	10a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Any experience with a counselor or a volunteer mentor?	
11		**Getting any kind of help or accessing support services can take some work. What can you tell me about how you got help from services?**	
	11a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Was that difficult?	
	11b	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Did you think that was reasonable or unfair?	
12		**Your interactions with helpers might have been different in how much support you felt. What can you tell me about your interactions in different areas?**	
	12a	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Housing?	
	12b	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Access to medical care?	
	12c	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Job opportunities?	

	12d	POTENTIAL PROMPT: Education?	
13		**What do you think you might do in the future about education?**	
	13a	Can you tell me more about that?	
14		**We've talked about a lot of different things. Is there anything you'd like to go back to and comment again?**	
	14a	Thanks for mentioning that.	
15		**How would you describe your current living situation i.e. transitional, temporary, stable, permanent etc.?**	