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## Transitional Experiences of Young African American Women in Foster Care

Tiarra Michelle Myers  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

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Tiarra Michelle Myers

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Curtis Davis, Committee Chairperson,  
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Ronald Mancoske, Committee Member,  
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, University Reviewer,  
Social Work Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Transitional Experiences of Young African American Women in Foster Care

by

Tiarra Michelle Myers, MSW, LCSW

MSW, University of South Carolina, 2014

BA, Francis Marion University, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Social Work

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## Abstract

Emancipated foster youth continue to experience fewer positive outcomes after foster care despite the changes in legislation and the implementation of additional transitional living programs and supports such independent living programs. This quantitative research study followed a non-experimental, secondary data analysis to examine how independent living programs impact the outcomes for African American young women who have transitioned out of the foster care system compared to their Caucasian young women peers at age 17 and age 21. The exploratory study used data from the Children's Bureau National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Cohort 2. A cross-section comparison analysis was conducted through Wave 1 and Wave 3 quantitative data comparing African American and Caucasian young women. An independent *t* test analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the predictor variables as educational attainment, financial self-sufficiency, employment readiness, and high-risk factors as measured by the NYTD. Findings rejected the null hypothesis that stated that at age 17 outcomes for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency were statistically significant for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women aging out of foster care. The study found no statistically significant race differences for financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors between African American and Caucasian young women at age 21 ( $p = 0.25$ ) as measured by the NYTD. Results provide insight into environmental indicators in the context of foster youth transition into adulthood for African American young women. Findings may be used by administrators to help young women leaving the foster care system.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to all of the young women who have transitioned out of the foster care system, social workers, and social agencies.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee chair Dr. Curtis Davis, my committee member Dr. Ronald J. Mancoske, and Walden University. I would also like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through this journey. A special thank you to my husband Thomas, my son Amir and my daughter Ava, and parents Rodney and Vivian Hodges.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American young women encounter fewer positive outcomes than other races and sex despite federal legislation intended to serve all children (Lee & Ballew, 2018). Hence, social workers in the foster care system are essential to creating positive outcomes for African American young women. Social workers are responsible for helping to bridge the gap regarding educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors for African American young women through pushing for legislation to promote positive outcomes for youth transitioning out of the foster care system. This study addressed how independent living programs impact the outcomes for African American young women who have transitioned out of the foster care system compared to their Caucasian young women peers. I used data from a cohort study from the Children's Bureau National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Cohort 2 and performed a cross-section comparison analysis of Wave 1 (age 17) and Wave 3 (age 21) comparing African American and Caucasian young women (Children's Bureau, 2019).

This chapter covers the statement of the problem, purpose statement, study variables, research questions, research impact on the problem, nature of the study, the theoretical foundation, definitions for research terms, and significance of the study including implications for social work and the National Association of Social Work (NASW) code of ethics. All these sections highlight the significance of the issue and help orient the reader to the study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Future research is needed on education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors for African American young women at age 17 and 21 for all youth (Children's Bureau, 2019). Despite federal legislation that addresses the need for equitable experiences and outcomes, African American young women encounter fewer positive outcomes than other races and sexes (Lee & Ballew, 2018). African American young women are less likely to live above the poverty level and own their home or apartment compared to their Caucasian peers with more positive outcomes in education, employment, income, and housing (Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Rebbe et al., 2017). Though foster care outcomes among youth have been studied, this secondary analysis study was needed to gain a clearer picture and amplify experiences of African American young women compared to Caucasian young women who have aged out of the foster care system.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explain the outcomes of African American versus Caucasian young women after receiving independent living services related to educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors. Cohort 2 was selected as it provides the most recent 2018 survey results in data set data set data set seven published in 2019. NYTD is used to track the number of outcome variables as states must provide youth and develop outcome measures in operating their independent living programs. Identifying these outcomes can help social workers focus on the legislation and the independent living services that directly affect

these outcomes. The findings of the exploratory research have the potential to positively impact the problem by better understanding the issues and challenges African American young women face while in the foster care system.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for educational attainment?

$H_01$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for educational attainment.

$H_{a1}$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for educational attainment.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for employment readiness?

$H_02$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for employment readiness.

$H_{a2}$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for employment readiness.

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for financial self-sufficiency?

$H_03$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for financial self-sufficiency.

$H_a3$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for financial self-sufficiency.

Research Question 4: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for high-risks factors?

$H_04$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for high-risks factors.

$H_a4$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at baseline (age 17) for high-risks factors.

Research Question 5: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for educational attainment?

$H_{05}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for educational attainment.

$H_{a5}$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for educational attainment.

Research Question 6: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for employment readiness?

$H_{06}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for employment readiness.

$H_{a6}$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for employment readiness.

Research Question 7: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for financial self-sufficiency?

$H_{07}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for financial self-sufficiency.

$H_{a7}$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for financial self-sufficiency.

Research Question 8: Is there a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for high-risks factors?

$H_{08}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for high-risks factors.

$H_{a8}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between African American young women and Caucasian young women at post follow up (age 21) for high-risks factors.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The propositions associated through both theoretical lenses of the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and the African American feminist theory directly related to testing the less positive outcomes African American young women face compared to Caucasian young women, which affect their ecological experiences and outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the importance of people's experiences in multiple environments or systems to understand one's behavior (Peil et al., 2016). The multiple system-level interactions between government legislation, child welfare policies, and practices are uniquely intertwined in systems and impact a young person's outcomes. Furthermore, macrosystems address the more prominent societal factors such as federal

policies and funding, which affect one's overall economic conditions. The ecological systems theory thus highlights the multiple domains across which aging out youth experience forces that may influence their educational or financial self-sufficiency trajectories.

The cultural contexts of the African American feminist theory regarding African American young women cultural groups often share common heritage, values, and experiences. This theory provided informal knowledge of the complex systems and factors that affect foster care youth outcomes. The theory is used to analyze systems that have historically oppressed, suppressed, and neglected the experiences of African American young women, mentioning "systemic punishment" (Roberts, 2014). The system has historically neglected the experiences of African American young women through practices. African American feminist thought synthesizes knowledge in a manner that is crucial in highlighting the perspective of African American young women and their place in the overall struggle to reduce and eliminate gender, race, and class inequalities (Howard-Hamilton, 2004).

African American feminist thought and Bronfenbrenner's theory helped to understand the dynamic lived experiences of and amongst groups (Peil et al. 2016). I examined the data from NYTD on the micro-level, which is the foundation and most influential level of the ecological systems theory. The macro-system level focused on federal funding through the Public Law 106-169 John F. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) initiative for independent living programs in the United States. The federal funding for independent living services directly correlates to financial,

housing, counseling, education, employment, and other appropriate supports for foster youth to prepare them for self-sufficiency during the life-changing emancipation from the system.

### **Nature of the Study**

Exploratory research is usually conducted when a researcher has just begun an investigation and wishes to understand the topic generally (Creswell, 2009). Exploratory research is used to explain why particular phenomena work in the way that they do. This study was a secondary analysis of social survey data used for an exploratory research study using NYTD to analyze the outcomes for African American young women and promote positive outcomes by embracing differences to ensure dignity and respect (NASW, 2021). This study builds on foster care literature with an emphasis on African American young women. For instance, the quantitative research design built on Watt and Kim's (2019) study on educational attainment, employment, homelessness, and incarceration by race. This quantitative analysis was based on the social survey data from the NYTD to compare African American young women and Caucasian young women from age 17 to 21. Mean comparisons using the independent samples *t* test were used to compare race for four composite variables at age 17 and age 21 because they were scaled. Statistical significance was established using a significance level of ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The study used the following variables: independent variable race and education attainment (certification received variable, education aid, current enrollment and attendance), employment readiness (employed full or part-time, receiving employment-related skills training), financial self-sufficiency (other financial support, or public assistance), and

high-risk factors (connection with adults, homelessness, substance abuse, incarcerated and children) as the dependent variables.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*African American (African American):* In general, a youth's race is determined by the youth or the youth's parents. An African American or African American youth has origins in any of the African American racial groups of Africa (Children's Bureau, 2019). This was a self-reported variable in the data.

*Foster care system (also known as out-of-home care):* A temporary service provided by states for children who are unable to live with their families. Children in foster care may live with relatives or unrelated foster parents. Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living (Children's Bureau, 2019).

*Foster youth:* A child who becomes a ward of the state, usually by local welfare services or court order (Children's Bureau, 2019).

*Sex:* Gender differences along with various transitions to adulthood provide support for the important differences between males and females in the general population (Children Bureau, 2019). Sex is self-reported in the NYTD.

*Independent living programs:* Independent life skills training programs domain teaching career planning, communication, daily living, home life, money management, self-care, social relationships, work life, and study skills Foster Care Independence Act (Children Bureau, 2019).

*Transition:* The point at which foster care youth leave the child welfare system. Foster care youth experience a movement from one situation to another by exiting the foster care system (Courtney et al., 2010).

*White:* In general, a youth's race is determined by the youth or the youth's parents. A Caucasian youth has origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (Children's Bureau, 2019). This was another self-reported variable.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addressed the specific outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women regarding educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors at age 17 and 21. The results of this study should increase overall knowledge of how race is an essential factor in the experienced outcomes for foster care youth. The study also explicitly highlights the Social Work Code of Ethics regarding the responsibility to the profession by critically examining current and emerging knowledge relevant to the field through research by examining outcomes for foster care young women.

### **Gaps in Clinical Social Work Practice**

The literature is under-developed regarding the outcomes of African American young women aging out of care when considering NYTD Cohort 2 Waves 1 and 3. There is a lack of data indicating that the experiences of African American young women are different and impactful. It remained integral to funding trajectories and identifying best practices and legislation for this vulnerable population as the top database for the United

States. This study addressed the limited research area: how financial self-sufficiency, employment readiness, educational attainment and high-risks factors affects African American young women compared to Caucasian young women positive outcomes when aging out of care. I addressed a practice gap filled for more inclusive and sensitive considerations for a vulnerable population in addition to training implications for students and those who practice.

### **Relevance to Social Work Co-Learners**

In this study, the co-learners are social workers who work, practice, or teach in relation to the foster care system. The study is relevant to social workers to understand and find discoveries that may positively influence the macro impact with this vulnerable population. Based on findings from the study, co-learners can implement new strategies to potentially decrease unhealthy outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women one at a time. Understanding the impact of African American young women experience in the foster care system is important for social workers to serve as a change agent to positively influence the lives of youth and the social work profession. This directly supports the NASW standards for cultural competency emphasizes cultural awareness and social diversity as an ethical responsibility (NASW, 2021).

### **Study Support for the NASW Code of Ethics**

The NASW Code of Ethics 6.01 social welfare promotes the realization of social justice in cultural values, institutions, and the social context (NASW, 2021). The ethical principles involve social workers always acting in the best interest of the youth by

improving the policies and procedures for this population (NASW, 2021). The importance of practicing the dignity and worth of a person in research is evident for social workers. Regardless of the following factors of age, race, ethnicity, gender, etc., every person has to be treated with dignity and worth (NASW, 2021). For a social worker, respect is a vital principle when addressing the needs of others, including the youth. It is essential to be thoughtful and respectful while embracing and understanding differences.

Examining the outcomes of African American young women through NYTD provides social workers a clear direction with which to aim services to positive change. The study addresses how social workers within the child welfare system interact with African American young women and satisfy the NASW code of ethics. The NASW Code of Ethics 1.01 commitment to clients speaks to social workers' responsibility to promote the well-being of clients and 1.05 cultural competence regarding demonstrating an understanding of culture, its function in human behavior and society, and 6.01 social welfare to promote the realization of social justice in cultural values, institutions, and (NASW, 2021). Through an exploratory research methodology and comparison of means test analysis, this study helped to understand better the issues and challenges of African American young women as they transition into adulthood while in the foster care system.

### **Potential Implications for Social Change**

This study might engender supports for needed programs that otherwise may not be continued with revenue policy changes down the road. The study clarifies the program impact, which may influence program support or criticism. This study supports social

change within the foster care system to focus on the disproportionate percentages of healthy outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women. The study provides a secondary analysis of critical data regarding foster care outcomes for African American young women compared to their Caucasian young women peers that can be used to guide implementation for positive social change with real-world implications on many levels. On the macro level, the study has the potential to impact policy development for social change African American and other minor races are more likely to being confirmed for maltreatment and placed in the foster care system and overall spend more in the system (Children's Bureau Express, 2020). There has been an overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups such as African Americans in the child welfare system relative to their representation in the general population (Children's Bureau Express, 2020). This study also contributes to the knowledge base by offering pivotal considerations for policy and practice in the social work profession for foster care youth. Increased enrollment in these programs may improve these young adults' future regarding education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered a background on the study's topic including support for the theoretical foundation and nature of the study. The chapter also covered the significance of the study including potential social change implications. The following chapter consists of the literature review focused on the transitioning process for foster care youth in the United States; foster care legislation and funding trends for this population, foster

care youth experiences and outcomes; independent living programs concerning foster care youth experiences, outcomes, and the cultural aspect; independent living programs provided to this population; and studies investigating NYTD for foster care youth. A summary of the chapter follows the literature review.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The decades of federal legislation have made a conscience effort to support the outcomes of youth transitioning out of the foster care system who experience increased adverse outcomes related to education, employment, socioeconomic, health, and connections after transitioning out of care (Bernett et al., 2018; de Journey & Huang, 2016; Spencer et al., 2010). They typically encounter these outcomes due to a lack of independent living skills services (Hallik, 2013; McCormack & Issaakidis, 2018; Oshri et al., 2018). Children who age out of the foster care system engage in high-risk behaviors and have unhealthy life outcomes such as poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and poor health (Children's Bureau, 2019). Over 430,000 children were recorded in the foster care system nationwide, and 21,000 youth were emancipated at the end of 2016 (Children's Bureau, 2019). Accordingly, legislation has been a critical factor in addressing the growing needs of youth in the foster care system. Each year in the United States, more than 23,000 youth transition (aging out) of care and have to fend for themselves (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 20201).

Several studies have been conducted to better understand foster care youth outcomes regarding education and personal relationships (Beisse & Tyre, 2013; Pecora et al., 2005; Rumberger et al., 1999). Over the past 20 years, states have received over \$2.8 billion in federal funds for Chafee programs, but little evidence shows the programs' effectiveness for youth transitioning out of care (Yelick, 2017). Further, previous literature explored outcomes based on the NYTD, a data collection system created to track foster care youth's progress, but there is a need for additional examination of

African American youth due to racial disparities in the foster care system (Watt & Kim, 2019). Although foster care youth outcomes have been studied in various ways, the NYTD outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women from Cohort 2 have not been well studied. The purpose of this study was to identify the various facets related to the outcomes of African American young women compared to Caucasian young women transitioning out of the foster care system. This literature review explores recent research and perspectives to expand knowledge or reported experiences of African American young women, disparate outcomes, comparisons, and the impact of social workers.

This chapter contains an in-depth literature review that addresses the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, literature on transitioning out of foster care in the United States, foster care legislation, funding trends, outcomes and experiences, cultural aspects, independent living programs, and the NYTD. The chapter concludes with a summary of the current literature and a discussion of the importance of African American young women effectively aging out of foster care.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The topics researched for this literature review included human services, child welfare, and foster care. Multiple databases, search engines, and combinations of key search words and phrases were used to find scholarly and peer-reviewed articles for this literature review. I used Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations PsycINFO, and SOCINDEX. The literature for this study came from publicly available peer-reviewed sources found using search engines. In total, approximately 250 articles were reviewed

for this research study. A combination of the following key terms and phrases were used to search the databases and search engines: *foster care outcomes, foster care adolescents, African American, minority, transition, aging out, emancipation, educational attainment, at-risk behaviors, health insurance, homelessness, self-sufficiency, financial literacy, incarceration, National Youth in Transitions Database, independent, and transitional programs.*

The search was conducted for current research regarding African American young women, foster care youth, and education and employment outcomes over time since the United States legislation. This section addresses research related to foster care youth outcomes, significantly associated with NYTD. Of particular interest regarding the two out of six independent variables that were found based on the literature review were as follows: financial self-sufficiency and educational attainment, connections with adults, experiences with homelessness, high-risk behaviors, and access to health insurance. However, primarily, the concept focused on was the independent living programs for foster care youth.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes people's experiences in multiple environments or systems to understand individual behavior (Peil et al., 2016), and the African American feminist thought synthesizes knowledge in a manner that is crucial in highlighting the perspective of African American young women and their place in the overall struggle to reduce and eliminate gender, race, and class inequalities (Howard-Hamilton, 2004). I used the systems theory to provide information regarding the

relationships between NYTD Cohort 2 to examine how outcomes have changed over time for this population. An ecological approach provides a more comprehensive methodology to understanding high-risk behaviors experienced by youth in care (Farineau, 2016). An ecological approach can be used to discover the challenges faced by foster care youth with disabilities during their transition to adulthood (Harwick et al., 2020). Using an ecological model is helpful for transition planning for this population before leaving care. Further, Bronfenbrenner's theoretical work helps understand their experiences across multiple levels and can offer future practice and policy implications (Peil et al., 2016).

I examined the data from NYTD on the macro-level, which is the foundation and most influential level of the ecological systems theory. Examining at this level can help organizations better understand the dynamics and how they affect this population's experiences and outcomes. Accordingly, social workers are working with this population to focus on the importance of these populations to create healthy outcomes and self-sufficiency. The macro-system level can identify the federal funding trends legislation for independent living programs in the United States. Through this program, states were provided with flexible funding to carry out programs that assist youth in successfully transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The federal budget for independent living services directly correlates to financial, housing, counseling, education, employment, and other appropriate supports for foster youth to prepare them for self-sufficiency during the life-changing for emancipation from the system.

## **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

### **Transitioning out of Foster Care in the United States**

Numerous studies have addressed youths' experiences when transitioning from the foster care system into adulthood. Youths' transition experience out of care defines and sets the tone for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, foster care youth who receive additional support may increase their opportunities to align with their peers who typically have that support through their families. Providing social and financial support for foster care youth to their late 20s is likely to increase their educational attainment for this population (Gypen et al., 2017). But youth struggle with postsecondary education, employment, annual earnings, housing, mental health, and substance abuse. Overall, foster care children are at a more statistically significant disadvantage than their peers from the general population. Because research has not been conclusive on transition support services, it is important to examine outcomes to address this population's health inequalities (Everson-Hock et al., 2011). Transitioning out of care should focus on a plan, goals, and concerns regarding the process, with increased support around planning and goal setting for foster care youth before emancipation to assist adolescents' life goals and plans (Lemus et al., 2017). To address transition concerns, legislation was passed to help promote a successful transition into adulthood. The following section addresses the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (the Chaffee Act), Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and the U.S. funding trends for the foster care system.

### **Relative Foster Care Legislation**

Federal involvement in the child welfare policy includes the Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1974, Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, Independent Living Initiative in 1989, Foster Care Independence Act in 1999, Fostering Connections to Success Act in 2008, and The Affordable Care Act in 2008 (Jones, 2019). The John F. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act was signed into law in December 1999 by President Clinton (Children's Bureau, 2019). Accordingly, states were provided with flexible funding to carry out programs that assist youth in successfully transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The federal funding for independent living services directly correlates to financial, housing, counseling, education, employment, and other appropriate supports for foster youth to prepare them for self-sufficiency during the life-changes for emancipation from the system.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 created federal funding for states to extend the formal foster care services up to age 21. But only 31 states formally developed for foster care youth even though it is associated with better outcomes (Courtney et al., 2018; Rosenberg & Abbott, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2019). Through this legislation most youth are eligible for Medicaid after they age out of care. Increasing service provisions, examining policy changes over time, and potential gaps in services can lead to adverse youth outcomes (Rosenberg et al., 2019). The government primarily funds the foster care programs supported through the policies.

## **Foster Care Monetary Trends**

The United States has several legislative acts that provide services and support for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The John F. Chaffee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 mandated federal funding to all states' independent living programs to increase health outcomes for foster care youth (Children's Bureau, 2019). There is a key relationship between federal funding in the CFCIP services and foster care youth outcomes (Chor et al., 2018). The CFCIP receives \$140,000,000 each fiscal year; in 2020 it became \$143,000,000 per year (Children's Bureau, 2019). The programs also receive an additional \$60,000,000, which are authorized to be available for payments to states for education and training vouchers for youths who age out of foster care to help the kids develop skills necessary to lead independent and productive lives (Children's Bureau, 2019). The act expanded the provisions for independent living programs to help these children between 18 and 21 years of age transition to self-sufficiency by providing financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services (Children's Bureau, 2019). The child welfare system must hold its stakeholders accountable for youth success through foster parents, school agents, and national policy and legislation (Stapleton & Chen, 2020). Foster parents and school personnel have to actively create and maintain a supportive environment for foster care children to thrive, for whom this can be a refuge.

Additionally, society has attempted to identify a variety of means of improving outcomes for these former foster care youth. For instance, over the past decade, legislation has evolved by extending the foster care age-out as 18. Based on a sample of

26 records, youth who stayed in care at age 19 compared to those who leave at age 17 had higher rates of employment, incomes, and increased educational attainments (Courtney, 2009; Courtney & Dworsky, 2005; 2006; Courtney et al., 2010; Courtney et al., 2001, 2011; Jones, 2019). Two critical transitions faced by this population are (a) the movement into emerging adulthood and (b) exiting the foster care system to live independently (Jones, 2019). But funding can support a student with completing an educational program and achieving financial sufficiency (Jones, 2019). Thus, legislation directly influences foster care youths' experiences and outcomes.

### **Foster Care Youth Outcomes and Experiences (Culture of the System)**

Transitioning out of the system can be challenging for youth who are unable to achieve permanency, which may cause lifelong consequences. Many adolescents who age out are more likely to engage in risky behaviors and experience hardships such as low educational attainment, homelessness, joblessness, early parenthood, and substance use (Clemens et al., 2017). Furthermore, foster care youths' outcomes and experiences with barriers to educational attainment are commonly centered on foster care's emotional consequences (Clemens et al., 2017). Applications for social work practice regarding educational experiences may lead to low expectations for educational attainment. The authors expressed the need for an improved partnership between local child welfare and educational agencies to address the systematic challenge of trauma and mobility that foster care youth face with the educational system. The Fostering Connections Act of 2008 and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 increased communication and ensured the agency's plan for students' educational stability in foster care in the United States.

The authors used three guiding questions: (1) what factors do former foster youth believe contribute to how students in foster care exit/or drop out of the K-12 system? (2) why do old foster youth think substantially more foster care students earn a GED than a high school diploma? (3) what do former foster youth recommend for improving educational outcomes for students in foster care? (Clemens et al., 2017). There was a limited sample size of 16 participants in four focus groups; the majority were young women. The results emerged in nine domains: emotional consequences, resilience, basic needs, internalized messages about education, educational stability, desire for school stability, coordination of school transitions, the impact of disengagement, and alignment of curriculum/graduation requirements (Clemens et al., 2017). The authors concluded a need for future research regarding the educational attainment gaps for students in foster care.

According to Barnow et al. (2015), the longer the youth were enrolled in job preparation, transportation, childcare, education support services, and life skills, the higher the education and employment outcomes. The results showed a correlation between independent living skills to achieve positive results as youth transition into adulthood (Barnow et al., 2015).

According to Neal (2017), foster care youth's success in transitioning out of care reported having a connection to a supportive relationship with an adult in high school, which almost all reported having at the time. The findings indicated an increased academic resilience for foster care youth who experienced a supportive relationship with an adult. The sample consisted of 57 undergraduate students out of 247 surveys identified

by the current or former foster youth institutions; an electronic study was used to gather the data measuring the participants' resilience, equity, and social-emotional health. The students' motivation for success appeared to come from a seemingly negative space. The study found that extracurricular programs promoted growth, academic attainment, and improved self-esteem. The findings confirmed the importance of adult supporters to increase academic resilience for foster care youth (Neal, 2017).

The experiences and outcomes of former foster youth regarding their transition out of care for every year past the age of 18 and enrollment in postsecondary education increase by 9 to 11 percent (Okpych & Courtney, 2020). The researchers state in the implications for future research that policy change in strategies to understand issues faced by this vulnerable population of students in external circumstances increases academic resilience for foster care youth. The models and instrumental variables measured the impact of years in care past the age 18 on three outcomes: enrollment by 21, persistence by 21, and degree of completion by 29/30—the sample size of 732 foster care youth in three states (Okpych & Courtney, 2020). The authors used the federal Fostering Connections law, which allows the option of increasing the foster care age limit from age 18 to 21. The alternative was presented to help improve foster care youth who typically aged out at 18.

They conducted a secondary data collection from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth. The longitudinal study gathered data for nearly 10 years in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin (Okpych & Courtney, 2020). The data used descriptive statistics of the sample control variables for race, age, risky behavior,

education leave, and states' detailed education aspects. The large sample size can be generalizable of the findings across other geographic regions and periods. As such, extended foster care may improve adequately and productively to help them with the challenges they face when pursuing a college degree. Research has shown statistically significant variations in race/ethnicity regarding experiences and outcomes for foster care youth.

### **Racial Differences**

According to Geiger and Beltran (2017), African American youth are less likely to live above the poverty level and own homes or apartments. Still, their research confirmed that Caucasian foster care alumni had more positive outcomes in education, employment, income, and housing (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). Literature shows that foster care agencies should provide social and financial support for such youth up to their late 20s to support their socioeconomic outcomes, psychosocial problems, and criminal behaviors as this would increase their opportunities to align with their peers who typically gain support through their family. The researchers found the need for increased educational attainment support for this population through examining NYTD.

The authors reported that Whites had a higher percentage in all three subgroups; most of the rate is in the lower subset (Rebbe et al., 2017). The findings identified differences between the youth's socioeconomic outcomes, psychosocial problems, and criminal behaviors. The latent class analysis consists of three subgroups of adversity: complex, environmental, and lower. The sample used for the study was from the Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth (Midwest Study), a longitudinal

study of youth aging out of foster care. The demographic was 354 males and 378 females, with most of the participants, 29.05%, African American and 8.02% White.

The research results identified differences between the youth's socioeconomic outcomes, psychosocial problems, and criminal behaviors (Rebbe et al., 2017). The implications for practice note that each young adult cannot be treated the same when aging out. As such, programs geared towards harmful outcomes need to be implemented due to research limitations based on participants' self-reporting. A comprehensive screening tool could be created and used for youth who are about to age out of foster care to guide which services are needed.

Fowler et al. (2017) state that African American children had the highest percent of never being placed, aged-out, and the lowest percentage for reuniting after placement. The sample consisted of 350 youth in the child welfare system from 2008 to 2009 using the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being Study (NSCAW II). The large sample and study design allowed for the generalizability of the findings. The authors collected follow-up data 18 and 36 months after the initial investigation (Fowler et al., 2017). They measured the following variables: housing problems, aging out status, youth demographics, county characteristics, state-extended foster care, independent living services, and aging out quality based on child welfare experiences. The results indicated that reunification between adolescents and parents can help them build a relationship to the extent that the youth may return home with them. An emphasis on independent living skills, family support, and plans for aging out children are critical to decreasing homelessness in this population.

Watt and Kim (2019) used NYTD to examine educational attainment, employment, homelessness, and incarceration by different races. According to them, the child welfare system must identify the social levels of inequities and disproportions by reducing racial/ethnic disparities in youth transiting outcomes to adulthood. They employed the NYTD cohorts one, two, and three with the primary independent variable of age and race/ethnicity.

The authors noted that the outcomes did vary for White, African American, and Hispanic foster care youth aging out of care. The results revealed that African American youth have lower employment rates but higher enrollment in higher education (Watt & Kim, 2019). Furthermore, increased supports and services for youth transitioning out of care can improve outcomes and racial/ethnic parity. In addition, African American youth were 16% more likely to be incarcerated during the follow-up period of two years. The study's future implications for focusing on children in state care revealed similar experiences and outcomes for the youth, depending on their race/ethnicity.

### **Independent Living Programs**

In the 1970s with limited funding, the Berkley Center of Independent Living in California was founded by Ed Roberts and others with disabilities in terms of the core values of dignity, peer support, consumer control, civil rights, integration, equal access, and advocacy (Access Living, 2019). In the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Title VII, Chapter 1 advises the following:

Promote a philosophy of independent living including a philosophy of consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination, equal access, and individual and

system advocacy, in order to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of individuals with disabilities, and the integration and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of American society (Administration for Community Living, 2021).

A few key provisions are the Act Designated State Entity, Statewide Independent Living Councils, State Plan for Independent Living, and Center for Independent living Standards for states to receive funding to provide independent living services for youth (Administration for Community Living, 2021). Independent living services and programs to which youth have access during and aftercare vary widely between states (Dworsky & Havlicek, 2009). Due to the federal legislation funding of independent living programs that allow states flexibility in how they utilize federal funds to provide programs for youth aging out. As such, the Fostering Connections Act has been instrumental in incentivizing states (through additional funding) to extend the age of foster care eligibility for young adults beyond the age of 18. Moreover, states are allowed to differ in their decisions regarding whether to offer extended foster care and to what extent, with some states doing so to 21 and others only to 19 (Lee & Ballew, 2018). Additionally, choices to extend foster care as well as services available to youth preparing to age out of foster care also vary from state to state based upon the levels of funding contributed by states to their own child welfare systems. Therefore, state-level policy decisions within the child welfare system require attention in ongoing child welfare research, particularly national studies where state-level decisions may directly impact outcomes among youth

aging out with disabilities—a group largely overlooked within research and legislative efforts (Lee & Ballew, 2018).

Independent living programs are aimed to provide life skills to youth who are at risk of aging out of the foster care system. Further, postsecondary education support and education financial services were correlated to a higher likelihood of being socially connected and lower chances of being socially excluded at age 19 (Lee & Ballew, 2018). The study's implications for future research regarding whether foster care of youth who participate in independent living services statistically significantly increases a successful transition to adulthood.

A systemic review of the literature published from January 2006 through December 2012 suggests that independent living programs improved educational, employment, and housing outcomes for foster care youth (Yelick, 2017). Three of the studies that indicated a higher percentage of African American participants also showed a higher number of girl participants (63% for Uzoebor et al. (2008); 58% for Mares & Kroner (2011); 55% for Kroner & Mares (2011). According to Petr (2006) and Powers et al. (2012), fewer than 50% of the sample identified as young women (48.1% and 41%, respectively) (Yelick, 2017). There is a lack of consistency in independent living programs for foster care youth, which have an increased risk regarding educational attainment, employment, housing, and life skills (Yelick, 2017).

Independent living programs serve to increase outcomes such as education, employment, and housing for youth aging out of care (Liu et al., 2019). According to Pecora et al. (2006) and Petr (2008), placement disruptions make it difficult for an

independent living program to be effective in educational outcomes (Liu et al., 2019). They found that foster care youth who spend a longer time participating in independent living programs correlate with improved academic outcomes (DeLorenzo, 2018; Lui et al., 2019; Milum, 2011). However, youth who are enrolled in independent living programs earlier can manage the multiple life challenges during the transition to adulthood.

In a quantitative study, Thompson et al. (2017) sought to describe the experiences of youth in care who received independent living services at some point in the past. The sample was drawn from Wave 3 of the NSCAW II (NSCAW, 2014) with 4143 youth and 3942 caregivers. In the study, the majority of the participants were Caucasian or African American, with about 50% young women. The participants noted they received limited employment and education resources before exiting the foster care system. The independent living skills were described as the following: how to interview, apply for college, open a checking account, rent an apartment, shop for meals, and use public transportation; get income assistance, help from the community, family planning services, and medical care (Thompson et al., 2017).

The data was collected based on the youth's independent living resources and skills between June 2011 and December 2012 from a national perspective. Federal and local governments may require agencies to use specific independent living services curricula based on evidence-based practices to improve outcomes. The study revealed a devastating number of youths who were receiving minimal assistance. There is limited

research describing the practice and policy implications that may improve or affect the services provided to this population (Thompson et al., 2017).

Katz and Courtney (2015) explored the unmet need for independent living services of young people transiting to adulthood through self-reporting. Federal funding was provided to states to create programs to help prepare youth to transition to adulthood. Accordingly, states had to assess the relationship between race and unmet needs. Resultantly, African American youth were more likely to express unmet needs. The relationship between participants and unmet needs at age 17 and 21 were health, employment, and finance (Katz & Courtney, 2015). A large percentage of participants noted they lacked in finance preparation, but 30% of the participants at ages 17, 21, and 23 indicated that they had received independent living services. The future implementations of this included the effectiveness of ILS training and whether youth feel more prepared for adulthood after receiving the benefits.

### **National Youth in Transitions Database**

The NYTD is a national sample for understanding this vulnerable population's issues. According to Scannapieco et al. (2016), the Transition Resource Action Center positively influenced youth receiving independent living services. The article's implications for research on practice and policy for NYTD include data gathering from youth before age 17 and after age 21. As such, states continue to provide increasingly reliable data to NYTD and identify the benefits of providing services to youth transitioning to adulthood (Children's Bureau, 2019). Until then, it is important to see the results in this report as only one piece of information that may be used to help inform state transition

planning services, practices, and policies (Children's Bureau, 2019). The researchers note the importance of examining NYTD as a national sample for understanding issues related to this vulnerable population. The six outcomes for NYTD are as follows: financial self-sufficiency (measured by questions to youth regarding their acquisition of skills necessary to enter the labor market and access to financial resources to help meet their living expenses), educational attainment (participants reported their current enrollment status in an academic program and the highest educational certification received), connections with adults (whether they currently have at least one adult in their life, other than a caseworker, to whom they can go for advice or emotional support), experiences with homelessness (if they have ever been homeless at some point in their lives), high-risk behaviors (substance abuse, having had children, and been incarcerated), and access to health insurance to determine if they have changed over time using NYTD (Children's Bureau, 2019).

The NYTD cohorts are a self-selected, non-probability sample from the baseline population and may contain non-response bias. Watt et al. (2019) attempted to determine if state support improved postsecondary enrollment of foster care youth. The study examined NYTD cohort one (2011–2015) for rates of enrollment in higher education. The literature presented well-known supporting information that foster care youth have lower educational attainment due to experiencing various barriers. Additionally, they experience higher mental and behavioral health problems that impact their academic and employment attainment (Emerson, 2006; McMillan et al., 2003; Shin, 2006; Watt et al., 2019). The analysis reveals a slight relationship between states' legislated tuition waivers

and the odds of secondary enrollment. Since recently, states have extended support to age 21 and promoted postsecondary education through new policies and programs.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 2, the comprehensive review highlights the literature search strategy theoretical framework for this study, the transitioning out of foster care, relative policies and monetary trends, outcomes and experiences, independent living programs, and the NYTD. As a social worker, it is important to understand how to move the needle in the profession, my community, with stakeholders, and the foster care system to promote positive outcomes. In the Chapter 3, the research and data analysis methods described to conduct the exploratory study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research design used in this study. The purpose of the study was to examine the outcomes of a social survey secondary analyses to describe the sample and explain the differences between of African American young women and Caucasian young women outcomes in the foster care system. The variables were educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors. For a social worker, it is crucial to be effective in daily practice with those receiving services. The study addresses the issues and challenges social workers encounter within the foster care system. This study allowed for personal learning, improvement, and development of practices guiding youth in the foster care system.

This chapter establishes the alignment of exploratory research design to discovering answers to the research questions. A description of the NYTD data collection is also documented in this chapter. Finally, the plan for data analysis is provided.

#### **Research Design**

The quantitative, nonexperimental, social survey research design involved secondary data analysis of the NYTD survey. The quantitative design was appropriate for this study because quantitative designs use measurement and statistical analysis to describe samples as well as examine relationships and difference between variables (Children's Bureau, 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine the independent variable of race compared to the dependent variable's education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors. The study focused on African

American young women compared to Caucasian young women outcomes as they have higher rates of unhealthy outcomes (Watt & Kim, 2019). The study examined NYTD Cohort 2 wave of young women: (n = 8,075) out of (N = 16,480) at age 17, and (n = 4,289) out of (N = 7,799) at age 21.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The Department of Health and Human Services must collect information from all 50 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, on youth aging out of foster care. The longitudinal outcome data pertaining to distinct cohorts of youth established every 3 years are reported every 2 years for the 2014 cohort; data were collected from 2014 for the 17-year-old baseline, in 2016 for the 19-year-old follow-up, and 2018 for the 21-year-old follow-up; the subsequent cycle of data collection begins with baseline collection in 2021, 3 years after the initial cohort was established. In this study, no data were collected, as secondary data analysis involved data from an existing database from National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), NYTD.

### **Sampling**

The original data from the NYTD used a combination of saturation and random sampling. The sampling of the baseline population no random sampling was done; it is a self-selected probabilistic sample by NYTD (Children's Bureau, 2019). This study was a secondary analysis only focusing on African American and Caucasian young women. According to Children's Bureau (2019a), only 15 states opted in to use sampling for Waves 2 and 3: Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana,

Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. This data set includes data on 12,000 total participants who completed the survey at each wave in 2014, 2016, and 2018. Though NYTD provides a national overview of services and outcomes, there are limitations due to the high dropout rates between NYTD data collection waves as a result of state policy, financial assistance, gender, and incarceration history. Weighted and unweighted model results and a discussion of the strengths and limitations of using weights to account for non-response bias are presented.

### **Instrumentation**

The NYTD survey is an opportunity for states to engage young people as partners in data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of survey results (Children's Bureau, 2019). The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) developed NYTD, which collects data on all youth and young adults currently or formerly in foster care who received independent living services paid for or provided by the state agency that administers the Chafee Program in addition to outcomes of young people in six areas collected through a short survey from data set seven (Children's Bureau, 2019).

This study used longitudinal panel data from NYTD (baseline from 2014 and follow up from 2018) of the outcome files. NYTD provides state-by-state information about Chafee-funded independent living service use (e.g., academic, employment, financial, health, and social support services) and transitional (including academic and employment) outcomes of youth aging out of care (Children's Bureau, 2019). NYTD provides youth-specific and service utilization information for 23,780 youth; a 4-year

follow up captures high school completion, postsecondary enrollment, and employment (the dependent variables), providing a response rate of 69% of Wave I respondents (16,480 youth; Children's Bureau, 2019). An advantage of using the NYTD secondary data analysis is cost-effectiveness and the ability to access the data to conduct an original study.

### ***Validity of the NYTD Data***

An external validity threat is that the data were collected using a probability sampling method, which limits the ability to make a statistical inference from this particular sample population. The present study used an independent sample  $t$  test to assess the predictive relationships between the independent and dependent variables for the saturation sample. The NYTD allowed states to have the discretion to choose the methods used to administer the Outcomes Survey to youth (e.g., in person, online, or over the phone) provided that the survey is administered to the person directly. States are to collect information on each youth who receives independent living services paid for or provided by the state agency that administers the CFCIP. Second, states are to collect demographic and outcome information on certain youth in foster care whom the state followed over time to collect additional outcome information. This information allowed ACF to track which independent living services States provide and assess the collective outcomes of youth. The individual state agencies collect the data. No one can answer for the youth, nor can data from other sources be used to answer questions. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary on the part of the youth (Children's Bureau, 2019). The NYTD review validates that the state's survey instrument includes all required

NYTD survey questions and response options and assesses the state's efforts to administer the NYTD survey appropriately, from invitation to survey completion (Children's Bureau, 2019).

### ***Reliability of NYTD***

Reliability of data collected in a study is the foundation to ensure accuracy of results and the statistical conclusions from the data analysis (Children Bureau, 2019). Each state is required to reported data to ACF every 6 months and the NYTD submissions are evaluated to ensure error free data. ACF developed the NYTD review to ensure the data are implemented correctly (Children's Bureau, 2019). The NYTD outcomes for the study were assumed to be accurate and reliable as well as generalizable to African American and Caucasian young women with similar backgrounds and experiences, as numerous scholars have used NYTD for secondary data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The secondary data from the NDACAN were downloaded and sent to me by a research aide from the NDACAN Project. NYTD is a national snapshot of service delivery efforts of state agencies aimed at assisting youth in making a healthy transition to adulthood. NYTD consists of two cohorts with participants surveyed at three different ages, 17, 19, and 21, during their transition. This study focused on Cohort 2 Waves 1 (age 17) and 3 (age 21) to examine and acknowledge the outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women. The data were imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software. Mean comparisons using the independent samples *t* test were used to examine race differences across all four

composite variables because they were scaled. Statistical significance was established using a significance level of ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

### **Ethical Procedures**

This research study was conducted based on the ethical standards of the Walden University Review Board (IRB; approval no. 08-25-21-0671130). Ethical procedures are a key function of exploratory research. A secondary researcher ensured that the participants of the NYTD were not harmed due to participating in the survey. Additionally, confidentiality was upheld to the highest standard. The NYTD outcomes for the study were also assumed to be accurate and reliable, allowing them to be generalizable to the population studied. This assumption was based on the fact that numerous scholars have used NYTD for secondary data analysis. In light of this, I professionally demonstrated ethical academic conduct. Furthermore, I complied with and adhere to standards advanced by the Walden University IRB.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 included a detailed description of the research methodology for this study. The rationale was supported by the research questions, data collection, and data analysis for this study. Finally, the ethical procedures of the study were addressed. In Chapter 4, the results from the data analysis are presented.

## Chapter 4: Results

The outcomes of young women in the foster care system vary based on a number of demographical and social factors. Literature suggests that across the United States age dictates more varying circumstances such as education attainment and high-risk factors (Courtney et al., 2018; Rosenberg & Abbott, 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2019). The purpose of this quantitative comparison study was to examine the relationship between African American young women compared to Caucasian young women at age 17 and age 21 for the following variables: educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors from the National Youth in Transition Database cohort 2 (2014).

### **Data Collection**

The NYTD is a national snapshot of service delivery efforts of state agencies aimed at assisting youth in making a healthy transition to adulthood (Children's Bureau, 2019). National Youth in Transition Database consists of two cohorts with participants surveyed at three different ages—17, 19, and 21. Cohort 2 data were gathered during 2014, 2016, and 2018. In the second cohort, 49% of the participants were young women. This study was focused on Cohort 2 to examine the outcomes for African American compared to Caucasian young women at age 17 and age 21 (transition age). The independent variable or race was examined as a predictor of the likelihood of the dependent variable's education attainment (certification received variable, education aid, current enrollment and attendance), employment readiness (employed full or part-time, receiving employment-related skills training), financial self-sufficiency (other financial

support, or public assistance), and high-risk factors (connection with adults (if no), homelessness, substance use, incarcerated and child (if yes)).

### **Data Analysis**

The independent sample *t* test was provided to compare the observed results of African American compared to Caucasian young women at age 17 and at age 21 from the National Youth in Transition Database cohort 2 (Children's Bureau, 2019). The independent sample *t* test compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population means are statistically significant different (Weaver et al., 2017). The given value (usually 0) for the means from the four groups. The analysis tests whether the difference in the means is 0. Mean comparisons using the independent samples *t* test were used to examine race differences across all four composite variables. Statistical significance was established using a significance level of ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

### **Sample**

The study used a secondary analysis of data collected from NYTD. The sample included young women participants who experienced the foster care system. Data were collected from these young women at ages 17 and 21. Data were collected from 4,017 African American young women participants and 6,941 Caucasian young women participants at age 17, and data were collected from 2,111 African American young women participants and 3,713 Caucasian young women participants at age 21. The attrition rates for this population involve youth who are no longer in care (Children's Bureau, 2019).

## Composites Variables

A composite variable is a variable made up of two or more variables or measures that are highly related to one another conceptually or statistically (Song, et al, 2013). The composites variables were used to compare self-described as African American or White. The composites are the following: education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors.

Educational attainment is a composite scaled variable that represents the number of the following educational attainment factors that the young woman possessed: (a) highest educational certification received, (b) whether she received educational aid, and (c) whether she was currently enrolled at an educational institution. A young woman receives a score that ranged from 0 to 6 to represent the following highest level of certification she received, respectively: (a) high school diploma or GED, (b) vocational certificate, (c) vocational license, (d) associate degree, (e) bachelor's degree, and (f) higher degree. Furthermore, a young women received a score from 0 to 2 for each of the following two factors they possessed: (a) whether she received educational aid and (b) whether she was currently enrolled at an educational institution. Scores across all three variables were summed to create a composite educational attainment score that ranged from 0 (*no educational attainment*) to 8 (*highest educational attainment*).

The employment readiness variable is a composite scaled variable that represents the number of the employment readiness factors that the young woman possessed. A young women received a score from 0 to 1 (0=no; 1=yes) for each of the following two factors she possessed: (a) whether has full-time or part-time employment or (b) whether

she received employment-related skills scores on both variables were summed to create a composite employment readiness score that ranged from 0 (*employment readiness*) to 2 (*employment readiness*).

The financial self-sufficiency variable is a composite scaled variable that represents the number of the financial self-sufficiency that the young woman possessed. A young women received a score from 0 to 1 (0=no; 1=yes) for each of the following two factors she possesses: (a) whether she received public financial assistance or (b) whether she received other financial assistance. Scores on both variables were summed to create a composite financial self-sufficiency score that ranged from 0 (*no financial self-sufficiency*) to 2 (*financial self-sufficiency*). This study focused solely on the monetary income received by these young women for this variable due to in society young women who are consisted to be financially self-sufficient would not receive those benefits. The following variables were excluded from the original dataset: public food assistance, public housing assistance, and social security. Public food assistance is provided to individuals in a form of food stamps and public housing assistance is in a form of a voucher. The social security variable is for individuals who meet the state's eligibility requirements. The supplemental security income refers to payments made to eligible low-income individuals with disabilities. The social security disability insurance payments are made to individuals with a certain amount of work history who become disabled or through a parent.

The high-risk factors variable is a composite scaled variable that represents the number of the high-risk factors that the young woman possessed. A young women

received a score from 0 to 1 for each of the following five factors she possessed: (a) whether she has no connection with adults (1=no; 0=yes), (b) whether she experienced homelessness (0=no; 1=yes), (c) whether she was ever referred for substance abuse (0=no; 1=yes), (d) whether she considered to have been incarcerated if the youth was in a jail, prison, correctional facility, or juvenile or community detention facility (0=no; 1=yes), and (e) whether she has had a child if given birth herself (0=no; 1=yes). Scores across all five variables were summed to create a composite risk score that ranged from 0 (*no risks factors*) to 5 (*high risks factors*).

### **Study Demographics**

The study demographics focused on young women who participated in the 2014 NYTD cohort survey at age 17 and young women who participated again at age 21. NYTD collected data of all races and genders reported in table 1. The study only examined NYTD cohort two-wave sample of young women of (N=8,075) out of (N=16,480) at age 17, and (N=4,289) out of (N=7,799) at age 21. The second part of this chapter provides results of the research questions.

**Table 1***Demographics of Population, Cohort 2 (Total Study)*

	Age 17 (n=16,480)		Age 21 (n=7,799)	
Race	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	494	3%	312	4%
Asian	165	1%	156	2%
African American or African American	5768	35%	2652	34%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	165	1%	78	1%
White	9888	60%	4757	61%
Unknown/Declined to Specify	1154	7%	468	6%
Ethnicity				
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	3296	20%	1638	21%
Sex				
Male	8405	51%	3510	45%
Female	8075	49%	4289	55%

The descriptive statistics for each of these four variables across the full sample in table 2 from the National Youth in Transition Database cohort 2 for African American and Caucasian young women. As shown in table 2, participants fell on the lower end of the education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors scales as the averages across the cohort from 2014-2018 ages 17-21 for all four variables are closer to the minimum scores. The skewness values for all four variables were positive indicating that scores tended to be on the lower end of the distribution. The employment readiness distribution fell within normal skewness ranges (i.e., between -1 and +1). The education attainment, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risks factors distributions fell slightly outside normal ranges. The kurtosis values were within normal ranges (i.e., -3 to +3) for all four variables. The negative kurtosis value (-0.24) for the employment readiness distribution indicates that the distribution is platykurtic or slightly

flatter as compared with normal distribution. The positive kurtosis values, 2.56 and 2.74 for the education attainment and financial self-sufficiency distributions, respectively indicates that the distribution is leptokurtic or more peaked as compared with normal distribution. The next part of the chapter, the discussion of results, includes an evaluation of the statistical assumptions and the results of the statistical analysis.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Composite Variables*

	<i>N</i>	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Education Attainment	6575	1.00	8.00	1.92	1.06	1.27	2.56
Employment Readiness	16997	0.00	3.00	0.59	0.72	0.87	-0.24
Financial Self-Sufficiency	7089	0.00	2.00	0.22	0.46	1.89	2.74
High-Risks Factors	16464	0.00	5.00	0.80	0.95	1.10	0.65

**Results at Age 17**

The results at age 17 section presented the analysis of African American and Caucasian young women. in Table 3. The results show a statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women at age 17 for the employment readiness and high-risk factors. At age 17, there was no statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. This result indicated that Caucasian young women tend to report higher levels of financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors at age 17 compared to African American young women.

This result indicated that Caucasian young women tend to report similar levels of educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 17 compared to African American young women. There was a no statistically significant difference found for educational attainment ( $p = 1.00$ ) at age 17. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted. Additionally, there were statistically significant race differences for employment readiness ( $p = 0.04$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. African American and Caucasian young women reported consistently on employment readiness at age 17.

There was also no statistically significant difference found for financial self-sufficiency, ( $p = 0.14$ ) at age 17. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted. Finally, there was a statistically significant difference found for high-risks factors, ( $p = 0.02$ ), at age 17. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Caucasian young women in foster care tended to report statistically significantly higher levels of high-risks factors at age 17 than their African American counterparts.

**Table 3***Race Comparison at Age 17*

	African American			White			Mean Difference	Test Statistic	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Education Attainment	2.05	129	0.79	2.05	234	0.97	0.00	0	1.00	0
Employment Readiness	0.36	2910	0.59	0.38	5204	0.61	-0.02	1.43	0.04	0.03
Financial Self-Sufficiency	0.12	365	0.36	0.17	790	0.42	-0.05	1.97*	0.14	0.12
High-Risks Factors	0.77	2775	0.91	0.82	5026	0.94	-0.05	2.27*	0.02	0.05

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Results at Age 21**

The results at age 21 section presented the analysis of African American and Caucasian young women. in Table 4. The results show a statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women at age 21 for the educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. At age 21, there was no statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women for employment readiness and high-risk factors. This result indicated that African American young women tend to report higher levels of educational attainment, and financial self-sufficiency at age 21 compared to Caucasian young women.

There were statistically significant race differences were found for education attainment at age 21, ( $p = 0.02$ ). African American women also reported statistically significantly higher levels of education achievements at age 21 than their Caucasian

counterparts, as shown in Table 4. The null hypothesis was rejected for race differences in educational attainment at age 21.

There were no statistically significant race differences for employment readiness ( $p = 0.25$ ), as shown in Table 4. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted. Both races reported similar responses to for employment readiness at age 21.

There were statistically significant race differences were found for financial self-sufficiency, ( $p = 0.02$ ), as shown in Table 4. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Specifically, African American young women in foster care tended to report statistically significantly higher levels of financial self-sufficiency at age 21 than their Caucasian counterparts. There were no statistically significant race differences for high-risk factors at age 21, ( $p = .38$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. African American and Caucasian young women comparable high-risks factors.

**Table 4**

*Race Comparison at Age 21*

	African American			White			Mean Difference	Test Statistic	<i>p</i>	Effect Size
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Education Attainments	1.87	1140	1.19	1.77	2079	1.10	0.10	2.39*	0.02	0.09
Employment Readiness	0.96	1410	0.74	0.90	2566	0.76	0.06	2.40*	0.25	0.08
Financial Self-Sufficiency	0.24	1059	0.46	0.22	2114	0.46	0.02	1.15	0.02	0.04
High-Risks Factors	0.97	1392	1.01	0.94	2530	1.03	0.03	0.88	0.38	0.03

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine racial differences between foster care African American and Caucasian young women at ages 17 and 21 of the following outcomes educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors. There were no statistically significant race differences in education attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 17. At age 17, Caucasian young women experienced more employment readiness and more high-risks factors than their African American counterparts.

At age 21 the results showed there were no statistically significant race difference for employment readiness and high-risk factors. The results of the study found a statistically significant relationship between educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. Results from the independent sample *t-test* led to reject the null hypothesis for Research Questions 2, 4, 5, and 6. Contrary to my expectation of this study, the finding reported higher levels of education attainment for African American young women at age 21 compared to Caucasian young women. Further work should focus on the other outcomes. In the next chapter, the results of the study. The interpretation of the study's findings and review the limitations. The recommendations are implications for future research are drawn.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This quantitative study was conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between African American and Caucasian young women at age 17 vs age 21 regarding educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors. The study used an independent sample *t* test to determine whether there were any statistically significant relationships between the variables. The study finding showed a statistically significant relationship between African American young women at age 17 for employment readiness and high-risk factors. At age 21, for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. The following chapter provides context for the study findings reported within the transitional experiences for African American young women foster care youth.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In previous studies, financial self-sufficiency and educational attainment has been the primary factors which grounded research regarding general foster care outcomes . In this study, African American young women compare to Caucasian young women at age 17 showed no statistically significant relationship for education attainment and financial self-sufficiency. The study reveals at age 17, there was a statistically significant relationship for employment readiness and high-risk factors.

In addition, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated that African American young women who age out of foster care experience lower rates of educational attainment, employment, homelessness (Watt & Kim, 2019). In the study at age 21 there was a statistically significant for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency.

There was no statistically significant relationship for the following outcomes employment readiness and high-risk factors at age 21. Foster care youth experiences impact their outcomes which are, commonly centered on foster care's emotional consequences as well as educational attainment barriers and the emotional effects of being in care (Clemens et al., 2017). The data analysis supports the phenomena for African American young women aging out of the foster care system compared to Caucasian young women. In this study, a statistically significant associations at the .05 level were found between African American young women age 17 for employment readiness and high-risk factor and age 21 for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency.

### **Findings Related to Theoretical Foundation**

The study predicted that Caucasian young women would have higher outcomes for education attainment; employment readiness; financial self-sufficiency but lower high-risk factors than African American young women. The African American feminist thought synthesizes knowledge in a manner that is crucial in highlighting the perspective of African American young women and their place in the overall struggle to reduce and eliminate gender, race, and class inequalities (Howard-Hamilton, 2004). The findings there were no statistically significant relationship between race in education attainment and high-risk factors at age 17. At age 17, African American young women experienced reported increased outcomes for employment readiness and financial self-sufficiency than their Caucasian counterparts. At age 21 the results showed there was no statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women for employment readiness and high-risk factors. The results of the study found statistically

significant race differences for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 21.

Additionally, the findings related to Bronfenbrenner's theoretical work, which helps to understand their experiences across multiple levels and offers future practice and policy implications (Peil et al., 2016). The theory was used to highlight the importance of considering the ecological systems impacts the experiences of these young women. Young women who enter the system often experience a disruption across all systems. The states provided these young women with specific resources to increase their outcomes as they transition out of the system. The results indicate a need for future studies to identify the causes of variations between races. Two critical transitions faced by foster care youth: the movement into emerging adulthood and exiting the foster care system to live independently (Jones, 2019). A gap in the literature revealed that funding could support the student with completing an educational program and achieving financial sufficiency (Jones, 2019). The legislation directly influences foster care youths' experiences and outcomes. The current study found statistically significant relationship at age 17 for employment readiness and high-risk factors. At age 21 the findings showed a statistically significant relationship for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency outcomes for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women.

Similar studies have also shown a correlation between independent living skills to achieve positive results as youth transition into adulthood (Barnow et al., 2015). African American youth are less likely to live above the poverty level and own homes or apartments (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). Caucasian foster care alumni had more positive

outcomes in education, employment, income, and housing (Geiger & Beltran, 2017). The presenting study finding revealed the opposite African American young women reported higher numbers for employment readiness at age 17 and education attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 21. Literature shows that foster care agencies should provide social and financial support for such youth up to their late 20s to support their socioeconomic outcomes, psychosocial problems, and criminal behaviors as this would increase their opportunities to align with their peers who typically gain support through their family.

The presenting study found statistically significant relationship at age 17 for employment readiness and high-risk factors. At age 21 found educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency as statistically significant for the subset of the foster care youth population. Not surprisingly, the findings identified differences between the youth's socioeconomic outcomes, psychosocial problems, and criminal behaviors (Fowler et al. 2017). African American children have the highest percent of never being placed, aged-out, and the lowest percentage for reuniting after placement (Fowler et al., 2017). Watt and Kim (2019), results revealed that African American youth have lower employment rates but higher enrollment in higher education.

Although there are limited studies comparing the financial self-sufficiency and educational attainment for African American young women, the literature participants noted they received limited employment and education resources before exiting the foster care system (Thompson et al., 2017). In the Thompson et al. (2017), study revealed a devastating number of youths who were receiving minimal assistance regarding

employment and education resources. In the presenting study, at age 17 African American young women reported higher employment readiness outcomes compared to Caucasian young women. At age 21, in the presenting study African American young women reported higher educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. There is limited research describing the practice and policy implications that may improve or affect the services provided to this population (Thompson et al., 2017).

Federal funding was provided to states to create programs to help prepare youth to transition to adulthood. The study did not find a statistically significant relationship between African American and Caucasian young women for neither employment readiness or education attainment at age 17 (Katz & Courtney, 2015). Caucasian young women reported statistically significantly higher level of financial self-sufficiency at age 17 compared to African American young women. Previous studies reported that States must be able to assess the relationship between race and unmet needs (Katz & Courtney, 2015). Resultantly, African American youth were more likely to express unmet needs. The relationship between participants and unmet needs at age 17 and age 21 were health, employment, and finance (Katz & Courtney, 2015).

### **Practical Applications of Findings and Recommendations for Action**

Even though the data shows some overall improvement for African American young women as they age out of the foster care system, it is critical for social workers to be a pillar for increase successful transitions of foster African American young women. According to literature, foster care youth need more education about independent living programs and how it can benefit them in the long run (Watt & Kim, 2019).

In the presenting study, the data revealed a statistically significant relationship race differences in educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 21. However, regarding the highest educational certification received variable, there was a greater percentage of young women who did not receive any post-secondary education or training by age 21. As a society higher education provides individuals an overall higher quality of life regarding their financial and standard of living. Continued research and review of empirical data can be used to increase social workers understanding which would allow them to communicate the services to foster care youth.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study was distinctive in examining the statistically significant relationship between the independent variable's education attainment, financial self-sufficiency, employment readiness and high-risk factors-for African American compared to Caucasian young women. Unfortunately, African American young women encounter fewer positive outcomes than other races and sex, despite federal legislation intended to serve all children (Lee & Ballew, 2018). The independent living program's goal is to help youth learn skills such as job search skills, money management, community resource, and decision-making skills to promote a health transition to adulthood. The social change implications for this study the opportunity for policy makers, service providers, and youth to review policies and practices to improve foster care youth's outcomes. The presenting study highlights the need for social change regarding the services provided to these young women. At age 17 there were no statistically significant relationship for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency and at age 21 there were no

statistically significant relationship for employment readiness and high-risk factors.

Which draws on the notion that the services provided to these young women are missing the mark. The outcomes at age 17 should be consistent with the outcomes reported at age 21 because they have received the independent living services provided by the states.

However, if youth in foster care receive positive direction and guidance the barriers they face regarding educational attainment, commonly centered on foster care's emotional consequences as well as educational attainment barriers and the emotional effects of being in foster care (Clemens et al., 2017).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study used NYTD data collection, gathered through self-reported data, which may include biases that threaten the internal validity thereof. Another design limitation variable may have been defined or categorized differently than in the current research question. An external validity threat is that the data was collected using a saturation sample which limits the ability to make a statistical inference from this particular sample population. The use of NYTD for saturation sampling in the present study meant that all participants had to meet the same criteria to participate in the questionnaire. A statistical analysis using the independent sample *t-test* with SPSS software to show the predictive relationships between the independent and the dependent variables. The secondary data analysis of archival data through NYTD, an existing publicly accessible database.

These data provide important insights into the transitions of youth from the foster care system, but several limitations must be divulged. Self-selection into the baseline cohort (through completion of the baseline survey within 45 days of one's 17th birthday)

presents an important problem of response bias (Children's Bureau, 2019). Another limitation within these data involves the variable methods of data collection. Although, the flexibility granted to states in determining the most advantageous data collection modality (e.g., in person, by phone, online, etc.) almost certainly helps to increase response rates, it may also introduce unintentional sampling bias. Furthermore, NYTD does not detail the independent living services, frequency, duration, and intensity limiting the depth of the study. Despite limitations, this national database provides the best available source of information necessary to advance the knowledge regarding African American young women experiences in transitioning out of care. The current study aimed to examine educational attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency, and high-risk factors for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women.

The secondary analysis data set lacks details regarding the type of independent programs the youth received. The number of participants from age 17 and age 21 decreased statistically significantly.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Additional research on the individual and overall impact of African American foster care you are needed. Increased overview of legislation such as the Chafee Program (1999) and the Fostering Connections Act (2008) of standardizing the independent living programs to ensure all foster care youth receive the similar services. Further studies are needed on variables other than those studied here gender, race, years in care, numner of foster placements, number of inpendent living services attend and many others ) that may

impact a youth's healthy transition to adulthood. Future research in those areas could yield a varied result. Providing more defined measurements for academic attainment such as grades, types of degree and post-secondary access could also yield a varied result. Future studies that utilize various research methods would also be beneficial such as an mixed methods design to incorporate real life testimony of the young in care. For instance, there are some purely qualitative studies that could gain helpful anecdotes of social workers and the African American young women. The use of a mixed method study including interviewing those who work with the youth would be helpful. There is also an area of policy analysis and advocacy that could arise from the research and action.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative, exploratory study was to assess the statistically significant relationship of education attainment, employment readiness, financial self-sufficiency and high-risk factors for African American young women compared to Caucasian young women at age 17 vs. age 21. The data source for this study was the NYTD cohort two. Overall, the results from this study revealed that African American young women from the NYTD cohort two study at age 17 had statistically significant relationship regarding less employment readiness and less high-risk factors compared to Caucasian young women. At age 21, the results revealed statistically significant relationship for educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency. In order to promote social change, it is important for all stakeholders of the foster care population require youth when eligible to enroll in independent living programs to improve their outcomes.

Additional education should also be provided to the stakeholder regarding the racial disparities minor in the foster care system encounter. National statistics show that in though African American are of a minority population there are 2x more likely to be placed in foster care (Fowler et al., 2017, Thompson et al., 2017, and Children's Bureau, 2019). Even though, the rates of child abuse are not higher for African Americans compared to Whites.

Furthermore, the findings from this study can be used to secure supplementary support for African American young women to ensure they receive their high school diploma/GED and how they can qualify to pursue post-secondary education. Foster care youth are a unique population who share a common experience. This common experience of affects their overall transition from the system to adulthood trying to adjust to their independence. Literature suggests a reduced percentage of postsecondary education enrollment foster care youth.

The results of this study suggest that there is an association between the ages, however, the results were weakened by a reduced in the sample size at age 21. Thus, questions regarding the former African American young women perceptions of support they received from the system is to be determined. Yet, this study provided some evidence of an statistically significant relationship for employment readiness and high-risk factors at age 17 and educational attainment and financial self-sufficiency at age 21 for African American in comparison to Caucasian young women . These results are encouraging based on literature reporting the unique challenges faced by African American young women. The foster care community can use this information to

empower African American young women and provide them with the knowledge and skills to take ownership of their transition into adulthood.

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