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Investigating the Experiences of Foster Youth on Community College Campuses

Jerrica Stimage
Walden University

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College of Education and Human Sciences

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Jerrica Stimage

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Review Committee

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Dr. Melissa Scotch, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
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Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Investigating the Experiences of Foster Youth on Community College Campuses

by

Jerrica Stimage

MA, Mississippi College, 2017

BS, Jackson State University 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

At the age of 18, foster youth are considered adults and typically released from the state's custody and left alone to transition into adulthood with little to no support. The lack of support that these youth experience forces many of them to seek refuge at colleges and universities. Prior to completing this study, I discovered that there is no current research that explores the lived experiences of former foster youth in the state of Mississippi or the challenges that they may face when transitioning to a community college in the state of Mississippi. The focus of this research study was to explore the experiences of former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi and engaged in campus-based support groups or received help from student services. In this qualitative, phenomenological study eight interviews were conducted that consisted of former foster youth that was guided by Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs theory. The interviews were conducted via video conference using the Zoom application. All interviews were transcribed and variations of the inductive approach was used to create codes, categories, and themes that communicate the interviewees' experience while also addressing the research question. The findings of this study suggested that former foster youth in the state of Mississippi need supportive relationships, college-entry programs, peer support organizations, mental health support services, and to be identified as a special population on community college campuses. Providing former foster youth with the different resources found in the study could lead to the social change of creating better retention rates, better student support services, better positive college experiences and better career opportunities for this population of students on community college campuses.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to all of the foster care youth across this nation. We see you and we hear you. Completing this study was all about creating a voice for the unspoken and the unheard. I dedicate all of this research to all future researchers, politicians, government leaders and officials, and the Mississippi Department of Human Services. My prayer for this research is that it will be used to change lives and to create a better future for our foster youth nationwide.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study's topic was developed to examine the lived experiences of former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. Examining the lived experiences of former foster youth was vital to discovering the essential needs of former foster youth while transiting and attending a community college in the state of Mississippi. The positive social change of understanding the needs of this population of students could lead to increasing community college retention rates of former foster youth and creating better paths of success for these youth during and after graduating from a community college. Providing additional services on college campuses could also create more positive experiences with student support services for former foster youth while attending a community college and help these youth establish an academic foundation that could lead to promising careers and futures. Improving programs and support services on community college campuses can also lead to increasing the enrollment for the former foster youth population of students. Chapter 1 provides a clear understanding of the research topic, research problem, theoretical foundation, definitions, key concepts and assumptions.

Background

Currently, in the state of Mississippi, former foster youth in the state of Mississippi are released from the state's custody at the age of 18 (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008). Considering that these youth are only 18 years old and have possibly experienced different forms of trauma while in custody, research suggests that these youth experience challenges when adapting to life after foster care (Unrau, Dawson, et al., 2012). These

youth and children exit the system with traumatic experiences that include, witnessing violent family or community deaths, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence exposure, sexual abuse, and community violence (Lee & Morgan, 2017). Due to the traumatic experiences that these youth face while in custody, they are not properly prepared to handle the transition of becoming a legal adult at the age of 18.

While in custody, research has shown that foster care youth in the state of Mississippi are not receiving the services or trainings that prepares them for adulthood or college. So many of these youth turn to community colleges as a means of survival until they can find ways to support themselves as adults (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008). However, when former foster youth turn to community colleges, they are still at risk of not receiving the proper services that they may need to even survive on college campuses. Due to the fact that there has not been any research completed to study the types of services that community colleges provide former foster care youth in the state of Mississippi, creates a concern and a gap of information that needs to be researched and addressed. Community colleges cannot properly provide services to these former foster youth if research has not been completed to discover their needs. This study was developed to examine the lived experiences of former foster youth who has attended at least one of the 15 community colleges in the state of Mississippi, to grasp an understanding on how community colleges can better serve this population of students. Understanding their needs can lead to creating better futures for former foster youth and place these youth on a career path of success, which is the ultimate goal of all community colleges.

Problem Statement

Once youth in foster care reach the age of 18, they are considered adults and released from the state's custody (Mulkerns & Owen, 2008). Even though these youth receive independent living training while in foster care, they still face many challenges while transitioning into the singular ability for autonomous reasoning and monetary self-sufficiency (Riley, 2003). During this life transition, it has been an increasing number of former foster youth that turn to colleges and universities as their plan of survival over the last years (Unrau, Dawson, et al., 2012). In 2015, 68% of 19-year old former foster youth in the state of Mississippi who exited the foster care system entered a Mississippi college or university (Transition Age Youth, 2015). With former foster youth seeking refuge on college campuses, the question at hand is determining if the programs and services offered to these youth are sufficient in helping them achieve success holistically while they matriculate through college. These programs and services should be evaluated because research suggest that even though these former foster youth are entering college, they still have a lower 6-year degree completion rate compared to students identified as low-income and first in their families to attend college (Okpych & Courtney, 2018). Research has also suggested that former foster youth face challenges when transitioning into college their first year due to a general lack of preparation for college and lack of supportive adult relationships (Franco & Durdella, 2018).

With research suggesting the struggle of former foster youth on college campuses, there is a need for research to be completed to understand if these student services and

programs are helping this population of students from their perspective (Huang et al., 2018). Many colleges and universities have created campus-based support programs and services that are increasingly available to assist former foster youth with their transition into college, but it is still suggested that there is still a need for research to be conducted to determine if the programs are effective (Schelbe et al., 2018). Hogan (2020) showed that when former foster youth participate in campus support programs and first year programs on their campuses, it increases their chances of having a better transition into college than former foster youth who do not participate in the campus support programs or services from the college staff perspective. However, Hogan did not focus on understanding the experiences of the former foster youth who received these services from the college staff. There are other previous researchers who studied the experiences of college staff members and the mentors who served as volunteers in these campus support programs for former foster youth, but they also lacked understanding the student's experiences of the campus support programs and services from their perspective (Huang et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that my study will help fill a gap in research for the state of Mississippi by understanding and focusing on former foster youth and their experiences with campus-based support groups and student services from their perspective.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former foster youth that participated in campus-based support groups or received assistance from student services while attending a community college from

their perspective. Interviews were used to capture an understanding of each former foster youth's experiences with these groups and services.

Research Question

RQ1- What are the lived experiences of former foster youth with campus-based support groups, programs and student services on their community colleges campuses?

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of Needs theory states that in order for an individual to reach their full potential, the five-tier model of human needs must be satisfied starting with the lower-level needs. The five-tier model of human needs, starting from the lower level are physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1954). The physiological needs of an individual are the most proponent of all needs, which consist of needing food, water, and rest (Maslow, 1954). After those basic needs are met, the next basic level is an individual's need to feel safe and secure. The first two-levels are considered the basic essential needs that every human being needs to be survive and reach any potential (Maslow, 1954). The next level of need is an individual's need to have healthy relationships, which is followed by an individual's need to feel accomplished (Maslow, 1954). The last and highest level on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model that many individuals struggle to achieve is an individual's need to achieve their full potential (Maslow, 1954).

In the year of 1970, Maslow first expanded his five-tier model by adding cognitive needs and aesthetic needs, and then later added transcendence to the motivational model (Maslow, 1970b). Cognitive needs derived from Maslow realizing

that there is a need for individuals to feel valued in an environment, in order for them to desire knowledge (Maslow, 1970a). Meeting this need, in turn gives an individual the opportunity to actively participate in expressing themselves in a more balanced way (aesthetic needs), which leads to personal self-actualization and then the desire to be a service to others, which Maslow described as transcendence (Maslow, 1970b). As time has passed, there have been many critics and evaluations completed by various researchers and scholars who have their own beliefs about Maslow's Model. Maslow's theory suggested that each level need does not have to be fulfilled in Maslow's original order because each level works independently within itself, which means each level is needed for survival (Tay & Diener, 2011).

Maslow's theory supports the assumption that if support programs and student services at community colleges can help meet the lower order needs of former foster youth, these students can reach their highest potential (Noltemeyer et al., 2021). Maslow proposed that needs are chronologically ordered, with an individual progressively and fully progressing to the attainment of growth only after deficiency needs are addressed (Maslow, 1943). Services and programs can be established to help improve the many challenges that these participants possess when entering college. Former foster youth tend to enter college with many challenges, especially when it comes to building relationships, friendships and even dating, which is the 3rd level on the hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1954). Franco and Durdella (2018) suggested that relationships with peers, family members, campus instructors and counselors, and social workers can create better college transition experiences for foster youth. So, even if support programs and student

services departments cannot meet all of the students' needs according to Maslow's theory, at least an effort can be made to determine what needs are important to the former foster youth while they matriculate through college.

Nature of the Study

For this study, a qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to analyze the lived experiences of former foster youth who participated in campus-based programs or received assistance from student services on a college campus. A phenomenological study helps the researcher study a phenomenon through data received directly from the participant (Moustakas, 1994). However, for this to be achieved, Moustakas (1994) explained that the researcher must dismiss all preliminary understandings of the phenomenon to uncover new knowledge from a different perspective. For this reason, I used the phenomenological approach because it can help uncover the different lived experiences of former foster youth that contributes to understanding why former foster youth struggle at community colleges. According to Hatch (2002), phenomenological research focuses on finding the "essence of human experience" (p.21). Therefore, data was collected through in-depth phenomenological interviews with 8 former foster youth participants about their lived experiences. Conducting semi-structured interviews with study participants allowed the researcher to discover and examine themes related to former foster youth's experiences with campus-based programs and services.

Definitions

The following are some major terms that were used in this capstone research project:

Aging Out or Emancipated: A child in foster care is normally considered to have aged-out of foster care when they become 18 or graduate from high school, whichever happens first, which means they are no longer in foster care and are totally accountable for their own well-being (Mardueno, 2019; Mulkerns & Owen, 2008).

Campus-based programs: Federal or local programs that are organized and established on college campuses to provide support to students (Gross, 2020).

Child welfare system: An agency, state, or organization that takes over administration of their care when a foster child enters treatment

Foster care: Foster care is a short-term placement for children who are unable to remain with their families (Child Welfare, 2020).

Foster care system: A type of child care in which a child is put with a family other than their biological family (Mardueno, 2019).

Independent Living programs: The Independent Living Program is a federally funded program that aims to help qualified kids successfully transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. (Child Welfare, 2020).

Assumptions

The researcher's preconceptions regarding the processes used in qualitative research are known as methodological assumptions (Dawson, 2017). There are three assumptions that could be consider true or factual without the need for research. The first assumption is that the participants will supply the researcher with facts that will support the ideas that youth who have aged out of the foster care system needs extended services from the colleges. Secondly, it can be assumed that former foster youth will also provide

the researcher with factual information and experiences that will contribute to this research study.

Scope and Delimitations

This study served the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. For this study, the state of Mississippi and the 15 community colleges in Mississippi was the focused location. One on one semi-structured interviews was conducted to capture the experiences of the 12 participants. There are three delimitations for this study. The first delimitation is that all participants must have attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. Secondly, all of the participants must have attended a community college for at least one full semester in the State of Mississippi, which consists of 15 weeks with a winter or summer break that follows each term. For the fall semester, the term starts in August and ends in December with a winter break and for the spring semester, the terms start in January and ends in May with a summer break. The third and final delimitation is that all participants must have been in foster care for at least 6 months or more.

Limitations

When collecting data using semi-structured interview questions, the interviewer-interviewee interactions can possibly affect the success of the interview and the quality of data retrieved (Wienclaw, 2019). To limit the issues that may occur from the interviewer-interviewee interactions, I ensured that the interviewees were comfortable and fully aware of the full process of the research study. It was useful to incorporate the three basic components to the interview protocol to ensure a successful interview process, which

includes starting with a brief introduction, describing the research project, explaining the interview procedures, and an inviting the interviewee to ask questions about the study and procedures (Arsel, 2017). To eliminate unintentional bias of any kind, the researcher closely followed the Ethical Principles of Psychologists, which require all researchers to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in the science, teaching, and practice of psychology (APA, 2017). Another resourceful tool that was used to eliminate experimenter's bias is member checking. Member checking consist of allowing the participants to examine the data for precision and validity (Birt et al., 2016).

Significance

The results of this study helped to fill the gap in understanding former foster youth experiences with campus-based support groups and student services from their perspective. This research contributed to filling the gap of helping colleges move to providing specialized services for this population of students by investing in the planning, development, and long-term sustainability of campus support programs (Lenz-Rashid, 2018). In order to do so, as recent researchers suggest, we needed much more information about whether these programs are being implemented as intended and what types of practices are most effective for this population of students from the student's perspective (Watt et al., 2019). The United States government recognizes the lower percentage rate of former foster youth who enter college and see the need for more financial assistance to be provided to former foster youth (U.S. Government, 2016).

Significance to Social Change

Social change is all about finding ways to serve the world around you in a positive manner. Considering the possible implications of this study and the data that was obtained from the participants in this study, achieving positive social change for the population of former foster care youth in the state of Mississippi is inevitable. The data from this study should bring about the positive social change of encouraging state leaders, the Mississippi Community College Board and legislators in the state of Mississippi, to provide more funding to better and/or create more campus-based programs and student services, which leads to more educated former foster youth. The findings of this study can also create the social change of increased graduation and retention rates of former foster youth for the state of Mississippi and other local states. When these foster youth receive the education and careers that they need, it can also decrease the number of these participants that rely on government assistance as a means of survival. The positive social change for this study is saving the lives of young people in the state of Mississippi and creating better career and educational opportunities for a population of young people who desperately needs the support.

Summary

This chapter provides background material on earlier investigations and the need for additional research on the campus-based programs and student services for former foster youth in the state of Mississippi. The importance of former foster youth needing additional services on their community college campuses was also highlighted in this

chapter. The next chapter will provide a literature review for this study that will provide more background information on current.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the literature on the current community college student services programs and campus-based support groups for foster youth. This chapter includes a brief history on foster care and the process of “aging-out” of the foster care system. This review also focused on understanding the issues that foster youth face when transitioning from foster care into college and certain services that are needed for these youth, according to current literature. Foster care has been the way of life for many children and youth for many years in the United States. Some children and youth become a part of the foster care system as early as birth and as late as 18-years old. Some foster youths are fortunate enough to be released from custody through adoption, while others remain in the states’ custody until their 18th birthday (Mardueno, 2019).

However, depending on the circumstance of former foster youth, during their time in custody, receiving a college education is possibly the last plan on their agenda when they reach the “aging-out” age of 18. After being released from custody, these youths are considered adults having to enter this world to survive on their own. The government has developed certain services to assist these former foster youth with the Independent Living programs, but they are given with certain guidelines and provisions. Therefore, due to limited experiences and support that these young people lack, some former foster youth turn to colleges until they find a plan for lives (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012). With former foster youth seeking refuge on college campuses, the question at hand is

determining if the programs and services offered to these youth are sufficient in helping them achieve success holistically while they matriculate through college. Also, considering that there is no current literature or research that can found specifically for the state of Mississippi, in regards to former foster youth and the services that they may need while attending a community college, this research could be a gateway for positive social change in this state. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of former foster youth that participated in campus-based support groups or received assistance from student services while attending a community college from their perspective.

Literature Search Strategy

To complete this literature review, various electronic databases, theses, and related dissertations were used to search for relevant literature. The Walden library database was a key significant resource for this literature review. The following databases were searched: EBSCOhost, APA PsycArticles, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM Complete, APA PsycInfo, ERIC, SAGE Premier, and PsycNET. Google scholar was also used as a research database for this study. The keywords searched were *aging out of foster care, issues after aging out, foster youth in higher education, life after foster care, foster care youth, college support for former foster youth, campus-based programs and foster youth.*

During this research process, there was an abundance of literature found on foster care youth transitioning to adulthood, the issues that former foster youth encounter after aging out of foster care and how colleges across the globe have worked to provide additional services to former foster youth on college campuses. Literature was also

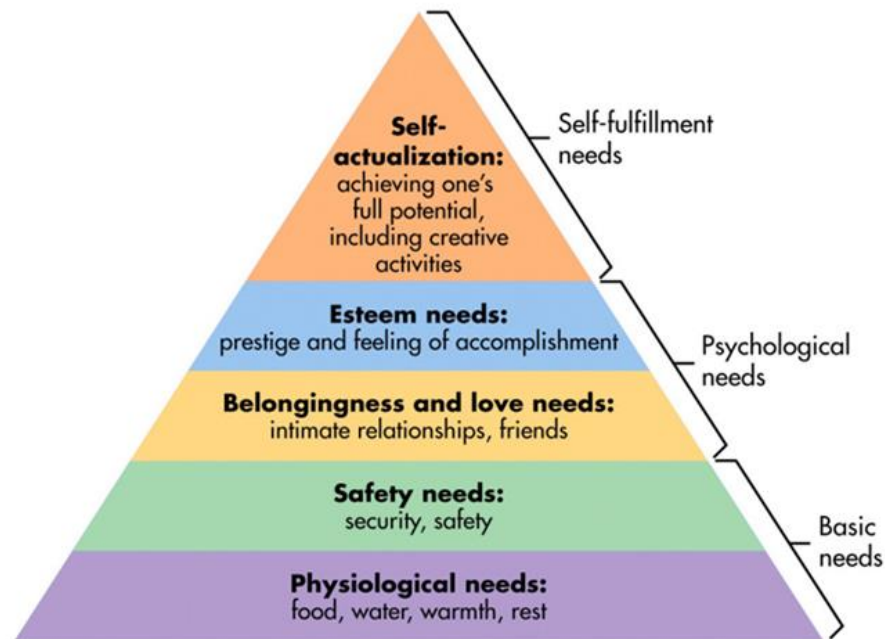
discovered on understanding how former foster youth differ from the average nonfoster care youth on college campuses and how former foster youth you need additional support. However, the research was limited on the evaluation of campus-based programs and student services for former foster youth on college campuses. It was also limited information on the evaluation of these programs and services from the former foster youth's perspective.

Theoretical Foundation

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory was developed in 1943. Within this motivational theory, the hierarchy of psychological, safety, social, self-esteem (confidence), self-actualization, and other human needs is examined (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's beliefs suggested that in order for an individual to reach their full potential, the five-tier model of human needs must be satisfied starting with the lower-level needs of the hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). The five-tier model as seen in figure 1, begins with the psychological needs being first, then the need for safety, then the need for belongingness and affection, then the need for confidence, and finally the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). The needs serve as motivators and organized in a hierarchy (Kermally, 2005). However, Maslow's study also proposed that each need can be replicated as individual's progress through life and as circumstances within or outside of their control change (Maslow, 1987).

Figure 1

The original Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid



In 1970, Maslow expanded his theory by adding cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, and transcendence to the motivational model, as seen in figure 2 (Maslow, 1970b). In the expansion, starting from the bottom first level, physiological needs comes first, followed by the need for safety, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self-actualization needs, and transcendence needs (Maslow, 1970a). The added levels to Maslow's theory provides the understanding on why former foster youth struggle on college campuses. It can become very difficult for this population of students to realize their full potential (self-actualization needs) enough to develop a desire to help others (transcendence needs), if they do not understand themselves or the world around

them (aesthetic needs), lack understanding (cognitive needs), or don't feel valued or loved (esteem and belonging needs) as a student on a college campus and in life (Maslow, 1987).

According to Abbas (2020), higher education institutions are responsible for preparing and training students for careers in a variety of public and private organizations, which represents guiding students to reaching their full potential. Freitas and Leonard (2011) stated, "Analyzing student needs will identify concerns and issues that impact achieving academic success, even in the earliest stage of academic preparation." However, again this cannot be achieved if college intuitions, faculty and administrators are not aware of the basic needs that students possess in the classrooms and on their campuses (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). Therefore, the key factor of Maslow's theory for this study is physiological needs, which are those basic needs that some former foster youth lack when they enter a college campus.

Figure 2

Maslow's Expanded Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid



Psychological Needs

According to Kermally (2005), psychological needs are the primary needs for food, air, drink, shelter, warmth and sex. Research suggest that if these basic needs are not met, an individual will spend a large amount of their time and life activities trying to fulfil these basic needs (Kermally, 2005). Here is where you find the development of poverty and homelessness amongst former foster care youth, which makes it difficult for these students to focus on obtaining college degrees when aging out of the system. According to the National Foster Youth Institute (2020), when foster youth reach the age of 18, 20% of foster children become homeless instantly. Dworsky et al. (2013) discovered that youths transitioning out of foster care are at a high risk of being homeless during their adult years. Due to the fact that many of these children leave the child welfare system before any long-term arrangements can be made, which leaves them vulnerable to homelessness (Bender et al., 2015). Also, according to Verulava et al. (2020), some former foster youth do not have positive experiences during the transition of aging out of foster care and lack financial, social and psychological support.

Therefore, if these youth are focused on surviving and obtaining their basic psychological/surviving needs, it can seem almost impossible for professors and college administrators to expect these students to perform at their highest levels of ability (Kermally, 2005), especially when there are possibly no additional support provided on college campuses for this population of students. Researchers Freitas & Leonard (2011) conducted a study about student needs using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and

discovered in their findings that many times there can be resources available for students, but they may not know about the resources or how to access the resources, which means faculty, and administrators should work to assist students as needed. Maslow's theory suggest that higher needs are less efficient (prepotent) than lower needs, which means the more these basic needs are met, the healthier the individual's psychological wellbeing will be (Maslow, 1954).

Review of Literature

History Foster Care

According to Child Welfare Gateway Information, which is a service of the Children's Bureau, the Administration for Children and Families and the United States Department of Health and Human Services defines foster care as a transitional program that states offer for children who are unable to live with their families (Child Welfare, 2020). The National Foster Parent Association stated that foster care has been in the United States of America since the early 1500's, which allowed poor children to be placed with laborers until they were of age to take care of themselves (National Foster Parent Association, 2020). It wasn't until 1853 that state governments and social agencies became a part of foster care placement for children and youth, which was due to the high number of children and youth who were living in the streets of New York (History of Foster Care, 2020). Starting in the 1900's, many agencies such as the Children's Bureau and laws were put in place to protect and serve children and youth who were unable to live with their parents.

For the State of Mississippi, the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) governed over the provisions of foster care starting in the late 1900's. After years of providing services for the state of Mississippi under Mississippi Department of Human Services for foster care children and youth, the state officials decided to separate the child welfare agency from MDHS and declared Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services as an independent agency (Mississippi Department of Child Protection, 2020). When the agencies separated, the state created the Independent Living Program, which offers useful knowledge and preparation so that as young people transition from state care on their 18th birthday, they can better achieve positive results (Mississippi Department of Child Protection, 2020). When foster youth reach their 18th birthday, they are eligible for emancipation, which is referred to the term "aging out" system (Mardueno, 2019).

However, for the state of Mississippi, the Administration of Child Welfare Law provides services for youth up to the age of 21. In order to qualify for extended adoption assistance between the ages of 18 to 21-years old, a youth must 1.) have mental or physical disabling condition which warrants continuation of benefits;" (2) if the child is still in high school through the end of the month of graduation or (3) in a GED program for a period of four months after the youth's 18th birthday (Child Welfare, 2020). With these guidelines set, many youth are not fortunate to stay in custody until the age of 21.

Foster youth who attend high school while in custody, typically change schools 3 or more times, which prolongs their time in high school because changing schools can typically lead to the loss of credits towards graduation (Clemons et al., 2016). Losing

class credits towards graduation can lead to some foster youth being in school beyond the age of 18. Inconsistency in school policies and graduation requirements across schools, districts, and states cause hardship, especially for participants who changed schools and placements frequently (Harwick et al., 2020). Due to this issue, foster care youth around the country are graduating at significantly lower rates than their nonfoster care peers (Clemons et al., 2016). According to Johnson et al. (2020), transferring students often disrupts established relationships and again also put them behind academically as they tried to adapt to a new school world on their own.

Trauma and loss of relationships.

According to Mardueno (2019), over 23,000 foster youth “age out” of the foster care system with little to no support and no place to turn for help. When former foster youth age out of the system, they lose all of their former benefits and state support such as health care, financial assistance, counseling for emotional management, and housing (Mardueno, 2019). The loss of healthcare, counseling and emotional support for former foster youth is important because children and youth that enters foster care has endured various types of traumas, which puts them at a higher risk of developing emotional and behavior issues (Beyerlein, & Bloch, 2014). Approximately 300, 379 children and adolescents entered foster care due to physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, drug abuse (parent), or alcohol abuse(parent) as of 2019 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Therefore, when these children and youth enter foster care, there is a possibility that they are bringing along traumatic experiences that will require the need of

healthcare and counseling for emotional management beyond the age of 18 (Mardueno, 2019).

While in foster care, child welfare focuses on helping the children and youth in their care build relational permanency, which allows them to work on learning how to develop healthy and mutually supportive relationships that would help them navigate into a successful life of adulthood (Ball et al., 2021). However, due to the traumas of neglect, loss, attachment and multiple types of abuse they have faced, these children and youth face difficult challenges trying to achieve the skills and willingness to build any type of relationship with anyone (Ball et al., 2021). Moretti et al. (2019) stated that the loss of attachments and relationships with primary caregivers is one of the most significant traumas they face when they are put in care. Research suggest that when they transition into temporary placements with temporary parents and siblings, foster youth may face challenges from complicated relationships with people who come and go in and out of their lives (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2019).

So, even though children retain some interaction with their parents, siblings, other relatives, and foster siblings after their initial placements, many former foster youth have confirmed losing contact with their parents, siblings, other relatives, and foster siblings after several placements (Hartinger-Saunders et al., 2019). Losing those supportive relationships can cause more damage than the actual traumatic experience itself (Moretti et al., 2019). Therefore, depending on the issues that the youth faced before they entered foster care, it is almost impossible to expect this youth to be prepared for adulthood on their 18th birthday the following year. So, even if these youth in foster

care realize the value of supportive relationships with adults, which could be support for them when they leave the foster care system, they might not have the time and skills needed to build these relationships (Ball et al., 2021).

Challenges after “aging-out”.

Olson et al. (2017) completed a study that examined the decision-making skills of foster youth when they age out of system transitioning to life as an adult because at the young age of 18, these youth have to make some serious life changing decisions. Research has shown that the transition into adulthood for all youth regardless to if they were in foster care or not can be challenging (Lee & Morgan, 2017). With this information, Olson et al. (2017) recruited 29 youth who aged out of the foster care system in the United States of America and 29 youth who had never been in the foster care system to examine this phenomenon. The participants consisted of 12 males and 23 females from an African American, White, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian background (Olson et al., 2017). All of the participants completed a questionnaire that consisted of open-ended questions that gave the participants the opportunity to explain their experiences of transitioning into adulthood (Olson et al., 2017).

The former foster youth were also asked to explain the challenges that they faced with aging of the system. In this comparison study, the results revealed that the former foster youth all had a similar view of the factual content of a decision as non-fostered youth (Olson et al., 2017). However, the foster care alumni had substantially lower overall decision-making scores than nonfostered participants and performed poorly in the domains of Identifying Alternatives, Selecting Alternatives, and Evaluating the Choice

than their non-foster care peers. (Olson et al., 2017). In addition to the results of this study, Olson et al. (2017) also discovered that there is a lack of services available for foster youth transitioning out of foster care at the age of 18.

The purpose of Haung et al. (2021) study was to see if the continuity of independent living services experiences at the ages of 17–19 protects youth aging out of foster care from homelessness and incarceration at the ages of 19–21. With the increasing number of youth that age out of foster care on a yearly basis and the creation of various independent living services, the researchers focused on evaluating the effectiveness of these independent living services for foster youth. To conduct this study, the researchers evaluated current national data information on 4,853 foster youth retrieved from the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) (Haung et al., 2021). The results of this study suggested that if foster youth are allowed to remain in foster care, receive financial assistance, academic support, employment support, life skills training and mentoring between the ages of 17-21, it lowers their chances of being victims of homelessness and incarceration (Haung et al., 2021). More importantly. Haung et al. (2021) stated, “Child welfare agencies should motivate youth aging out of foster care to complete high school and educate them about the financial feasibility of pursuing higher education.”

Challenges of healthcare and mental health.

Another issue with the loss of healthcare benefits for former foster youth is not just receiving counseling and emotional support, but also losing the assistance with purchasing needed medical medications for health mental and physical conditions.

Healthcare, Medicaid, and insurance coverage is important for former foster youth because they have a higher risk of substance abuse, disabilities, and mental health issues (Hirst, 2014). The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 was established to expand Medicaid benefits to former foster youth up to age 21 (Hirst, 2014). In some states, former foster youth can be eligible for Medicaid coverage up to age 26, but this eligibility is determined by the state and requires the youth to reapply every year (Hirst, 2014). This is great news for former foster youth, but if case workers and social workers do not inform the former foster youth on how to apply for these services, they typically lose their coverage (Hirst, 2014).

Considering the loss of health care assistance, counseling, emotional support, and healthy relationships when leaving foster care, entering college can be very challenging for these former foster youth. According to Hallet et al. (2018), when foster youth age out of the foster care system, enter college and adulthood, they bring issues into their new life that are associated with their experiences of various forms of abuse during their childhood, including sexual, physical, and emotional. Their study also discovered that trauma and difficulties that these former foster youth possess leads to academic issues that effects their reading, writing and math abilities (Hallet et al., 2018). When these former foster youths are trying to balance college life along with all of the emotional, mental, and physical issues that they already possess, it makes it very difficult and hard for these students to make it through their first year of college successfully.

With discovering this information, Hallet et al. (2018) study suggested that if community colleges create ways to provide this population of former foster youth with

resources for counseling, trained faculty support, a safe space on campus for support, extended housing support and financial aid support, it could increase their chances of being successful at attaining their higher education degrees. One of the most important strengths of this study is that it also identified that the former foster youth desire to be successful in obtaining their degrees because they are aware that having an education will lead to success in their adult lives (Hallet et al., 2018). So, if these former foster youths are motivated and resilient despite the circumstances that they have faced in their childhood and teenage years in the foster care system according to this study, community colleges should definitely work to bridge the gap of services needed for this population of students to be successful. Haggman-Laitila et al. (2019) suggested that with the lack services that these youth lose with aging out of the system, they need additional support and advocates to aid to them in their transition, whether into college or adulthood. However, the limitation of this study is that there was no follow-up information provided to determine if the implications of this study could be effective (Hallet et al., 2018).

Academic challenges after “aging-out”.

In a comparison study focused on understanding the educational gap between former foster youth and non-foster youth, it was reported that former foster youth were less academically prepared for college than non-foster youth (Gross et al., 2020). The data for this study was gathered from a Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) by the Higher Education Research Institute that consisted of data from 1,019 students that reported that they were a part of the foster care system or as a court dependent since the age of 13

(Gross et al., 2020). Another finding from this comparison study was that former foster youth and non-foster youth both shared an equal amount of aspiration to complete higher education degrees (Gross et al., 2020). Therefore, could it be that the issue is not that former foster youth do not have a desire to attend college, but rather uncontrollable barriers that hinders their academic process and forces them away from attending college. Gross et al. (2020) identified various barriers such as former foster youth being more likely to be classified as having a low academic self-concept, lower levels of college involvement, and a low feeling of science self-efficacy, in comparison to non-foster youth, which lowers their chances of achieving a postsecondary credential. Along with these barriers, other researchers identified finances being another hindrance for former foster youth (Hernandez et al., 2017).

According to Hernandez et al. (2017), even though 22 states have implemented the tuition waivers for former foster youth, they are still enrolling in college, completing college credits, and graduating at lower rates than their counterparts in higher-income families. The following states opted into the tuition waiver for college students: Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia (Hernandez et al., 2017). To find understanding on why former foster youth are not taking advantage of this funding, Hernandez et al. (2017) examined the policy and procedures for the tuition waivers for all 22 states and found that eligibility for participation tuition waivers vary greatly across states.

Therefore, in some states these former foster youth maybe eligible for tuition waivers and in one state they are not eligible. The bigger issue is that in the other 33 states, these students do not have access to tuition waivers, which adds to the low enrollment and graduation rates of former foster youth. According to the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (2018), only 32 to 45 percent of former foster youth pursue a college education after graduating or leaving high school. To increase these percentages, Hernandez et al. (2017) stated that “Tuition waivers are one promising move toward realizing these life goals for all youth placed in care.”

Some of the academic issues that former foster youth encounter in college, typically starts in high school (Sandh, 2020; Weinberg et al., 2014). Foster youth typically have poor participation and poor grades on standardized tests in high school, as well as low grade point averages and high rates of grade repetition (Weinberg et al., 2014). According to Okpych and Courtney (2017), these issues derive in high school from lacking resources, academic preparation, experiencing emotional, mental, and/or physical health issues and not having stable social support. According to Sandh (2020) study on the high school experiences of foster youth, 60.6% youth in foster care transferred schools at least once during their high school tenure. Additionally, Sandh (2020) findings suggested that a quarter of foster youth (24.8%) switched schools once, 15.6 percent switched schools twice, 11.0 percent switched schools three times, and 9.2 percent switched high schools four times or more. Therefore, if these former foster youth experience these changes in high school, this explains why they face academic challenges in high school and when they enter college.

Another major issue that contributes to foster youth's academic struggle is attendance (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Within Okpych and Courtney (2017) study on understanding social capital and increasing college enrollment for foster youth, they found that the participants(former foster youth) missed school three times on average due to foster care-related causes, and that they moved schools six times due to family transfers or changes in their foster-care placement. So, the academic issues and lack of enrollment on college campuses for former foster youth can be contributed to their low academic performance in high school, expulsion from high school, and the need for special education services while attending high school (Okpych and Courtney, 2017).

Campus-based programs and student services.

Over the last decade, there has been an uprising in campus support programs for former foster youth in the United States (Okpych et al., 2020). However, due to the large number of programs being formed across the United States, currently there is not a defined list of campus support programs for former foster youth. (Okpych et al., 2020). Geiger et al. (2018) study is one of the most recent studies that the researchers actually took an in-depth search into campus support programs for former foster youth. The findings from this study, suggested that 68% of campus support programs are concentrated at four-year institutions, whereas 28% are concentrated in two-year community colleges (Geiger et al., 2018). Even though campus support programs are on a continuance rise, Geiger et al., 2018 stated that it is still difficult to find and engage foster care alumni in higher education. To address these gaps, the researchers also implied that

future studies should research the experiences, transitions, and results of this subset of foster care graduates who are pursuing post-secondary education (Geiger et al., 2018).

Several studies have been conducted to determine how the former foster youth population of students on college campuses can be served in a better way (Gillum et al., 2018; Hogan, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2017). Other studies have also displayed the work that some states have done to better serve this population of students and to help former foster youth succeed at obtaining college degrees (Hernandez et al., 2017; White, 2018). However, various studies have implications that foster former foster youth attending college need additional support and services on campuses, along with the need to evaluate these programs and services from the youth's viewpoint to ensure their effectiveness (Geiger et al., 2018). Gillum et al. (2018) conducted a study focused on understanding the experiences of former foster youth students who participated in a campus support program at a university in the northern part of Texas. The participants were interviewed on the programs direct student support regarding financial aid, academics, career services, and counseling services at the end of 2 semesters (Gillum et al., 2018). For the first set of interviews after semester 1, there were 9 former foster youth students who participated in the interviewing process and for the second set of interviews after semester 2, there were 10 former foster youth student who participated in the interview process.

To ensure that the students had the chance to express their full experiences and beliefs about the programs, the researchers used open-ended questions to collect more in-depth data. The strength of this study was its contributing factor to evaluating specific

and more focused areas of support for this population of students. Focusing on specific areas such as laptop access, financial aid support, career services, academics and counseling services led to the discovery of how important these specific services are desired by former foster youth population (Gillum et al., 2018). However, the weakness found in this study is that researchers did not evaluate the students' academic progress or retention rates in connection with being served through the campus support program, which is the researchers' future implication of building relationships and partnerships within these programs externally and internally (Gillum et al., 2018). In the results of this study and data collected, the participants in the study gave positive feedback on the program's assistance in the areas of financial aid, housing, book stipends, career and counseling services (Gillum et al., 2018). Overall, Gillum et al. (2018) discovered that the student's desire having campus support programs and that they are important to their college journey. With these findings, the researchers suggested that program evaluations are valuable and needed (Gillum et al., 2018).

Hogan (2020) conducted a similar study that focused on trying to discover if former foster youth students who participated in a campus support programs had healthier experiences, than students who did not have such supports during their first year at a four-year university. The researchers examined the physical, mental, and emotional health of former and current foster youth students during their first year at a four-year university (Hogan, 2020). During the years of 2011 and 2013, the researchers recruited 123 southern California former and current foster youth participants who were interviewed before, or at the very beginning of, their first academic year at a four-year

university and again at the completion of their first two semesters or three quarters of attendance. For data collection, 114 participants who actually received services through the campus support program, completed face to face surveys and interviews. There were also 39 participants who did not participate in the campus support program.

The results of this study revealed that former foster youth who participate in a campus-based programs showed significant reductions in general health, mental health and emotional well-being throughout their first year at a four-year university (Hogan, 2020). The results also reflected a positive outcome for increased high self-esteem for former foster youth who did and did not participate in a campus-based program.

Considering these results, Hogan (2020) suggested that if colleges and universities provide additional support in the area of basic needs such as financial aid and housing services, it could help relieve some of the pressure and stress that former foster youth expressed that they experienced their first year.

The results from Okpych and Courtney (2017) study showed that school encouragement is needed throughout the enrollment process up to graduation at both 2-year and 4-year colleges and implied that colleges need to ensure that they are providing access and the availability of additional support services for former foster youth on campus. The strengths of Hogan (2020) and Okpych and Courtney (2017) studies is that the researchers took an in-depth look into the experiences and lives of the former foster youth participants at both 2-year and 4-year universities, which indicates that former foster youth needs assistance from their campus-programs beyond their first year of attending college, which supports the assumptions of this current study. However, the

limitations of both studies is that they only focused on interviewing participants after their first year, which leaves a gap in the research of understanding if the participants even graduated or even found additional support on their college campuses after the interviews were conducted. The studies revealed the issues that former foster youth face during this time of transition and recommended helpful implications colleges and universities, but there was no additional information provided from each study that implies if the campus-based programs or college support services contributed to the participant's matriculation to graduation (Hogan, 2020; Okpych and Courtney, 2017).

For example, Tallahassee Community College located in Tallahassee, Florida has a Fostering Achievement Fellowship Program that provides academic, job preparation, financial, and social support for foster youth making the transition to independent young adulthood (White, 2018). The Emerging Eagles Program-Fostering Achievement Program (2021) was established in response to the overwhelming need for a comprehensive support system to help foster youth move from formal foster care to independent young adulthood. This program is specifically designed to cater to the needs of former foster youth as they transition and matriculate through college. The four pillars of focuses for the Fostering Achievement Fellowship Program is academics, career readiness, Finances and additional support such as monthly meetings to ensure the continuation of services being provided for their students (White, 2018).

Another successful program, according to White (2018) is The Fostering Bright Futures Fellowship (FBFF) program located on the Wake Technical Community College campus in Raleigh, North Carolina. This program is a student success initiative that

explores the critical need for a robust support system to help our community's foster youth move from foster care to independent young adulthood (Fostering Bright, 2021). Beginning in high school, the FBFF program pairs each foster youth with a mentor that assist foster youth in achieving social, emotional, and academic success in college (White, 2018). In summary, the FBFF program is all about eliminating the barriers that former foster youth may experience during their matriculation in college. Although (White, 2018) highlighted these programs for having high successful completion rates, the weakness of this study is that there was no research indicating an evaluation of the programs from the student's perspective. Neither was there any information in regards to the state of Mississippi formulating any type programs on college campuses related to the Fostering Bright Futures Fellowship program or the Fostering Achievement Fellowship Program.

Funding for former foster youth after age 18.

Former foster youth in the state of Mississippi who has enrolled a postsecondary education program are eligible for a college-bound stipend, which allows purchases of bedspreads, curtains, rugs, refrigerators, microwaves, trunks, bookcases, small appliances, computers, furniture, and books/resource materials required to furnish a residence (Child Welfare, 2020b). According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020b), there are laws or policies in 38 states and the District of Columbia, including the state of Mississippi, that describe the services that help youth plan and prepare for postsecondary education programs, such as counseling, mentoring, career planning, assistance with completing admissions applications, and financial assistance. Outside of

these policies and programs, former foster youth can also apply and qualify for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which provides students with funding for post-secondary education (Child Welfare, 2020b). During the application process for FAFSA, students are asked to provide parent information and income, but former foster youth do not have to provide this information (Federal Student Aid, 2018). However, according to the Federal Student Aid (2018), when applying for FAFSA, former foster youth may be asked to provide proof that they were in foster care, homeless, a dependent, or a ward of the court by the financial aid administrator at their college or career school to receive these federal funds. This can lead to the issue of former foster youth not being eligible for funds because even if they don't have any written proof of their homelessness, especially if they left the system before the age of 18 or proof of being a former foster care youth, the financial aid office for that institution must still review their request for a homeless youth determination and determine whether they qualify as a homeless youth (Federal Student Aid, 2018).

Another additional source of possible funding for former foster youth for secondary education is the Education and Training Voucher (Child Welfare, 2020b). The ETV program, which was added to the Chafee program in 2002, is a federal financed, state or tribally administered program (Child Welfare, 2020b). For the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) funds, students can be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 to use towards tuition, room and board, meal cards, and books and school supplies only (Child Welfare, 2020b). To be eligible for ETV funding, the former foster youth must have graduated from high school and have been in foster care or who have left adoption and

foster care through kinship guardianship beyond the age of 16 or by adoption (Child Welfare, 2020b). According to Children's Defense Fund (2018), the age limit was initially set at 23, but under the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act, it was lifted to age 26. As stated previously, with former foster youth having academic issues that contributes to the former foster care youth not graduating from high school, this automatically disqualifies these former foster youth from ever receiving ETV funds.

Currently, as of April 2020, the state of Mississippi participates in the distribution of ETV funds for former foster youth who plans to attend college (Child Welfare, 2020b). Just as the other states across the globe, these youth can use these funds for items needed to furnish a residence (on or off campus), such as a bedspread, curtains, rugs, refrigerator, microwave, trunk, bookcase, small appliances, computer, furniture items, and books/resource materials (Child Welfare, 2020b).

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020b), these are the requirements that the former foster youth must adhere to in order to receive ETV funds in the state of Mississippi:

- Youth currently in the custody of DCPS
- Youth who have left custody at age 16 years or older and have not yet reached age 21 and have been in custody for at least 6 consecutive months after age 16
- Youth who were adopted at age 16 and have not yet reached age 21
- Youth who graduate high school or receive a GED or a certificate of attendance
- Youth who have participated in the ETV program prior to their 21st birthday in order to continue receiving ETV funds until their 23rd birthday.

In addition to the Education and Training Voucher, former foster youth in the state of Mississippi can also apply and qualify for Pell Grant by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as stated previously and also the \$500.00 Mississippi Tuition Assistance Grant (MTAG) funds (Child Welfare, 2020b).

The following requirements for eligibility is listed below:

- Be enrolled in an institution of higher education, as defined by the higher education act.
- Be in good standing with the college, university, or vocational training school
- Maintain a grade-point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale
- Make progress toward completing the program he or she is enrolled in (Child Welfare, 2020b).

However, despite all of the funding that the state of Mississippi provides for former foster youth, there are still improvements needed to help increase the support for these youth on the 15 community college campuses in the state of Mississippi. According to this literature review, more initiatives should be formed by the Mississippi Community College Board to help provide better services and campus support programs for former foster youth. Some community colleges across the globe has seen the need for additional support for former foster youth and have worked to create programs that will help serve this unnoticed population of students on their campuses (White, 2018). However, it is now time for the state of Mississippi and other states to make changes, just as Hogan (2020), White (2018), Geiger at al. (2018) and Okpych et al. (2020) implied from their research.

Exploring the issues that former foster youth encounter when exiting the foster care system at age 18 and the literature that identifying the needs of these youth when entering college is essential to improving the lives of former foster youth in the state of Mississippi (Geiger et al., 2018 & Okpych et al., 2020). This qualitative, phenomenological study utilizing semi-structured interviews will capture the true experiences of former foster youth that can be used to prepare 2-year colleges for this population of students on their campuses (Gillum et al., 2018; Hogan, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2017). Research has suggested that closing the postsecondary educational attainment gap between former foster youth will not be easy, but it is possible if we are willing to provide the correct supports and spend the required resources (Jackson et al., 2019).

Summary

To begin this literature review, a history of foster care and the process of “aging out” of foster care to provide a background understanding to why this population of students on a college campus needs additional support through campus support programs and student support services. The articles in this literature review provides a clear view of the current issues that former foster youth encounter after aging out of foster care that they sometime bring with them to a college campus. When foster youth age out of the system at age 18, due to the academic, mental and physical challenges that they encountered while in foster care limits their ability to succeed on a college campus.

This literature review also provided its readers with understanding the importance of establishing and evaluating campus support programs for former foster youth. Many of the articles in this review supports the need for college institutions to provide more

additional campus based support programs and student services for former foster youth due to the challenges that these youth encounter prior to entering college (Gillum et al. (2018; Okpych et al., 2020; & Hallet et al., 2018). Not only is there a need for more campus based programs, but also the need for foster youth to be given the opportunity to express their needs to their college institutions. The research sample and data collecting analysis will be described in Chapter 3 of this study's research methodology and design.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of former foster youth that participated in campus-based support groups or received assistance from student services while attending a community college. To accomplish this purpose, this study explored the experiences of the former foster youth through the perspective of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. This theory supports the assumption that individuals will be motivated if their basic needs and desires are met, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954).

Therefore, this study focused on understanding the lived experiences of former foster youth before and during their matriculation at a community college in the state of Mississippi. To accomplish this task, the researcher conducted one on one semi-structured interviews with former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. In this chapter, I highlighted the research method, the research design and the process in which the data will be collected and analyzed.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

This study addressed the gap in literature that identified the need for former foster youth to have additional services from campus-based support programs or student services departments on college campuses. To examine the experiences of the former foster youth, the following research question was used for this study:

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of former foster youth with campus-based support groups, programs, and students services on their community colleges campuses?

I conducted this study using a qualitative, phenomenological design. With the goal of understanding the lived experiences of former foster youth on college campuses, using a qualitative, phenomenological design allowed me to uncover the participants' experiences, find meaning in their experiences, and comprehend the processes that occur inside their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Participants' perspectives are central to qualitative method, which asks wide, general questions, collects data in many words from participants, and then shows and breaks down these words for data analysis (Merriam, 2002).

To gather structured data and information, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to grasp a full understanding of their experiences. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and research data from various studies conducted on former foster youth that was discussed in the literature review, the researcher constructed interview questions that will capture the lived experiences. The data from the interviews was also used to analyze if there is a pattern of needs amongst this population of students on college campuses. The interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the current pandemic of COVID 19. The plan was to keep the interviews at a maximum of an hour. The main purpose for choosing a basic qualitative research design was to interpret and dissect the experiences of these former foster youth to gain knowledge of their basic needs and desires from their community colleges (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

My main role as the researcher was to maintain all important ethical duties to the participants in my study, to my institution, my discipline, my profession, and to the journals to which my research will be submitted for publication (see Dragga & Voss, 2020). As a researcher in the field of psychology, I maintained the role of following the APA ethical principles and code of ethics. The APA (2017) suggested that in research, teaching, and publication, psychologists should respect and safeguard civil and human rights, as well as the vital importance of freedom of inquiry and speech. Since my participants were former foster care youth and there is a possibility they may have experienced trauma at some point in their lifetime (see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), my role as the qualitative researcher was to ensure that they felt safe and comfortable throughout this entire research process. To eliminate any possible cases of conflict, and for the sake of confidentiality, I did not recruit any participants who may have been current students at the institution with which I am affiliated.

Also, because this study was conducted in my field of work, I ensured confidentiality of the participant's responses was retained. In doing so, I did not expose or reveal the names of the community colleges that the participants mentioned during the interview. I protected the participants and their experiences at all times, especially during the reporting process. Also, considering that I am employed at a community college in the state of Mississippi and have worked with some of the community colleges in the state of Mississippi on different projects, there was a possibility that some of the participants may have known me. However, if a participant recognized me from a

previous position at the institution, the participant was given the opportunity to leave the study at any time. Also, to eliminate any possible conflicts, I asked participants at the beginning of the interviews how or if they knew me and explained that any prior communications did not relate to this study. To ensure another safeguard and to eliminate any institutional review board (IRB) issues, I also chose participants who were not currently attending the community college where I am employed. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), the method for safeguarding participants must be properly communicated and authorized by a relevant research ethical review board before the study may begin. I completed this method by having participants sign an informed consent form before the interviews. Walden University's IRB approved my study before collection any data.

Another important aspect of my role was to ensure that my opinions were not a part of the interview or analysis process. In qualitative research, the researcher's goal is to gain access to study participants' ideas and feelings without researcher's biases being present (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Therefore, the last important role as the researcher was to remain the observer and objective, which refers to the researcher's lack of prejudice or self-interest in evaluating and presenting the study's findings (Dragga & Voss, 2020). Throughout the study, as the researcher, I maintained researcher's integrity by not allowing my personal bias to impact the study results.

Methodology

For this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of

Mississippi. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology examines an event through the viewpoint of how a person perceives it, rather than how it actually occurred. Within a phenomenology design, to get new insight into events or situations, researchers use interviews, observation of individuals immersed in the situation, focus groups that debate their experiences, and participant notes and diaries (Moustakas, 1994). For this reason, a phenomenology research design fit this study because it allowed me to use interviews to explore and interpret the true experiences of former foster youth from their perspective.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research focuses on finding meaning within the context and requires a data collection process that allows data to be analyzed and interpreted. This particular methodology was chosen for this study because humans are the best suitable for accomplishing this goal and can easily be interviewed, observed, and analyzed, which was the main task of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semistructured interviews were conducted with participants to ensure that data saturation is accomplished. The sample size for this study was eight former foster youth who experienced receiving assistance from student services or support programs on a community college in the state of Mississippi. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), there is no specific sample size that ensures data saturation, which means during the interview and data analysis process, researchers should focus on acquiring thick but also rich data. Had data saturation not been met, I had plans to revisit the participant recruitment process.

Participation Selection Logic

Purposeful sampling was the method used to select participants for this study. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that all participants chosen were former foster youth between the ages of 20 and 25 who attended one of the 15 community colleges in the state of Mississippi. The former foster youth had to have spent 6 months or more in the Mississippi foster care system. The participants attended one of the 15 community colleges in Mississippi for at least a full semester (5-6 months). According to Benoot et al. (2016), purposeful sampling consists of finding volunteers who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomena being studied. Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to look for individuals who share specified characteristics and features with the representative group (Creswell 2009).

I conducted eight semistructured interviews with former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. This data collection method was used because it allowed me to collect enough data that would possibly lead to data saturation. Data saturation occurs when there is enough information to reproduce the study, the ability to gather additional fresh information has been gained, and further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, the justification of the sample size and sampling strategy can be found in the content of the interview questions that were derived from literature that supports the purpose of this study (See Appendix B).

Instrumentation

For this qualitative, phenomenological study, semistructured interviews were used as the data collection instruments. According to Thelwall and Nevill (2021), participants have a direct voice in qualitative interviews, allowing them to express their viewpoint in their own words and eliminating the risk of the researcher imposing their own viewpoint or restricting the topic of discussion. Therefore, the interview questions were in a semistructured format to ensure that the participants could fully answer the questions and express themselves completely. The semistructured interview questions were formatted in a way that was conducive to answering the questions in a "how" and "why" format. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was the foundation for the interview questions. I developed the interview questions from the literature review to create alignment within the study. I also constructed the interview questions from the suggestions of researchers who completed research on understanding the additional services that former foster youth needs on a college campus.

To obtain demographic information, the participants were asked to complete a demographic survey. A copy of the form is in Appendix C. Also, as the researcher, I functioned as the data collection instrument, which aided in the establishment of data saturation., I conducted the interviews as well as the follow-up interviews to ensure that the participants were given the opportunity to share additional information or to address any additional issues.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

The recruitment and the data collection process took place after approval had been given by the dissertation committee, the university research reviewer and the institutional review board. Due to the free authorization given to users to share and post flyers on social media outlets, the first and easiest way I recruited participants was by the solicitation of posting the flyer on my personal social media accounts found on Facebook and Instagram. The flyer discussed and listed the specific criteria required for eligible participants and contact information.

I also shared the flyer and information with members of the local communities. All the eligible participants were provided an email address, phone number, and was an option to sign up for the study using a QR (quick response) code, which was located on the flyer. The QR code was created using the flow code website that generates codes for users at no cost. The QR code allowed individuals to scan the generated code using their phones and submit a participant interest form that I created, using their smart phones. I also set a specific deadline for all participants to submit their request and/or contact me for participation. After the deadline, I selected participants for the study that met all criteria. In the case, that five participants were not recruited during my timeline, I extended the deadline to ensure that five eligible participants are chosen.

After the five participants were recruited, I contacted them to discuss interview dates and times. The participants interviews were conducted using the Zoom application. Before the interviews were conducted, I completely informed the participants about the possible benefits and risks that they may be subject to if they participated in this study.

Participants gave their consent to participate in the study by replying to the emailed consent form with “I consent”. After consent was received, I emailed the participants the secured Zoom login information for the interviews to be conducted.

The participants were reminded throughout the interviews that they are welcomed to stop the interviews at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The interviews were conducted and recorded on the Zoom application. The permission to record was obtained when the participants completed the consent form. I estimated a maximum of 1 hour for each interview when conducted. However, I prepared the participants that the interview could go over that time frame. At the conclusion of the interviews, I thanked each participant and gave them the option to make any final comments. After each interview, I manually transcribed the data verbatim to create a detailed and accurate record of the interview. I was the only one to view the recordings. After the interviews were completed and the data had been analyzed, the participants were given final opportunity to review that information that will be reported to ensure accuracy and validity with the date. Each participant reviewed the final transcript of their interviews and no changes were requested by any of the participants. Also, to create more validity and credibility, the participants were asked to sign a statement clarifying that the data presented is accurate.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Wong (2008), in qualitative research, data analysis refers to the process of carefully searching and organizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and other non-textual resources gathered by the researcher in order to better understand the phenomenon. Rich, dense descriptions was employed to detail the participants' views

and participation in order to achieve a sound presentation of the study's findings.

According to Green et al. (2007), the data analysis process has 4 stages, which are immersion in the data, the process of coding, creation of categories, and identification of themes. To successfully accomplish the task of analyzing the data from the interviews, following the normal tradition of manually coding worked best for this study, which included using colored pens to categorize data, identify patterns, and draw meaning from the data (Wong, 2008). Although manual coding was tedious and time consuming, the researcher was able to communicate and connect with the data, which generated a better understanding of the emergent phenomena and the generation of data-driven theory (Bassit, 2003). For this study, interpretation-focused coding was used, which consisted of not just describing the data, but also making meaning of data (Adu, 2019). Therefore, in order to help make meaning of the data, the researcher subdivided the data and categorized it (Adu, 2019).

Also, each interview transcript was compared to the others using a continual comparative approach. The data analysis plan that implemented consisted of reviewing transcripts, observation notes, and documentations numerous times to discover similar themes amongst the participants. To conduct this analysis process, a data-driven inductive approach was utilized, along with a thematic analysis process that employed a general systems approach. According to Thomas (2006), inductive analysis refers to methods that largely rely on comprehensive readings of raw data to generate concepts, themes, or a model through a researcher's interpretations of the data. The inductive approach's main goal is to let research conclusions arise from the raw data's frequent,

dominant, or noteworthy themes, without the constraints imposed by organized approaches (Thomas, 2006). Themes were formulated using the thematic analysis process that allowed the researcher to study the data carefully in order to uncover recurring themes, subjects, ideas, and patterns of meaning (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In order for this process to take place, quality data must be collected during the interview process (Green et al., 2007). Therefore, as the researcher, it was important to make sure that quality data was obtained, which made the task of moving forward and back through the transcripts, drawing on in-depth knowledge related to the study, returning to the research question, and thinking in terms of systems and theoretical concepts, a less difficult task (Green et al., 2007). Also, for privacy purposes, the participants were allowed to discuss the location of the community college that they attended during the interview process. However, names of colleges, faculty, or staff are not reported in the research results. To maintain confidentiality, all personal and place names were substituted with pseudonyms (Allen & Wiles, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the value of a research study is enhanced by its reliability and trustworthiness. In order to complete a “truthful” and credible research study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability must be addressed individually (Amankwaa, 2016). Authenticity was added in the latter years, which is the degree to which researchers accurately and faithfully depict a variety of diverse realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The key to accomplishing trustworthiness and all that it entails in research is having rich, suitable, and well-saturated data. Identifying

the appropriate data gathering approach to address the research questions of interest is the first step in ensuring the trustworthiness of content analysis (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

The main task of researchers should be to develop protocols and procedures that are required for a study to be considered worthy of readers' attention (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility

According to Cope (2014), credibility refers to the accuracy of the data or participant perspectives, as well as the researcher's interpretation and representation of them. According to Noble & Smith (2015), in order to establish credibility in qualitative research is to collaborate with other researchers to decrease bias in research, to substantiate conclusions, using rich and detailed verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts and to recognize sample biases and doing constant critical reflection on methodologies to ensure that data collection and analysis are sufficiently deep and relevant. As a researcher, it is important to not only avoid verbal bias during an interview, but also nonverbal bias such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures. To avoid nonverbal bias, the researcher used the interviewing the interviewer approach, which allowed the researcher to play both the interviewer and the interviewee by assuming the role of a study participant and enlisting the help of a colleague to conduct the interview, or the investigator can play both roles (Chenail, 2011). One of the most important benefits of using this approach is that it helped the researcher to identify any potential personal sentiments that arise throughout the interrogation (Chenail, 2011).

As the researcher, maintaining a professional without showing any emotion. One of the most important strategies that I completed to ensure credibility is member

checking. The strategy of member checking is simply a method of improving rigor in qualitative research, based on the idea that correct descriptions or interpretations of occurrences are inherently credible. The main purpose of member checking is to allow the researcher to guarantee that participant voices are accurately represented by allowing participants to confirm or reject the correctness and interpretations of data, bringing credibility to the qualitative study (Candela, 2019). Therefore, after the interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed, I allowed the participants to check over the information that was presented in the results. At this moment in research is when any information that was interpreted wrong can be addressed and resolved. Lastly, member checking can also ensure that the participants are being honest in their descriptions and experiences.

Transferability

To ensure transferability according to Miles et al. (2019), a researcher must give findings in the form of solid descriptive data or a detailed description of the facts so that readers could decide whether the findings were applicable to other situations. One concept to establish transferability is showing readers that the findings of a research study may be applied to various locations, circumstances, times, and populations (Patton, 2015). Another effective strategy that was used to create transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is thick description. The term "thick description" refers to a thorough account of field experiences in which the researcher expresses and contextualizes cultural and social patterns (Holloway, 1997). Ensuring that thick

description is used also helped indicate that the reader makes the transferability decision instead of the researcher.

Dependability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) refers to dependability as the concept of consistency, which means the researcher must determine whether the analysis procedure adheres to the acknowledged standards for a specific design. Therefore, the concept of dependability highlights the need for the researcher to account for the changing context in which research takes place. To keep accomplish this tasks of dependability, I used a reflexive journal, which is a form of diary in which a researcher keeps track of their findings on a regular basis (Amankwaa, 2016). The data collection, analysis, reduction, and synthesis, as well as the researcher's theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions and interpretations that lead to the research conclusions, are all detailed in a full audit trail (Wolf, 2003). The significance and importance of an audit trail, ensures that after the study is complete, another researcher or a second party who is knowledgeable with the qualitative study, its methodology, findings, and conclusions can audit the researcher's research decisions as well as his or her methodological and analytical methods, and so corroborate the study's findings (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). An audit trail provided validity and credibility to the research.

Confirmability

The aspect of neutrality is addressed through confirmability (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). The strategy of conducting a data audit investigates the data gathering and analysis techniques and makes conclusions about the likelihood of bias or distortion.

Using an audit trail is a strategy that ensures dependability and also confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail is simply a visible description of the research steps conducted from the start of a research endeavor to the development and reporting. According to research, audit trails can be used to accomplish confirmability because it allows the observer to follow the research process step by step by looking at the decisions taken and methods documented (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, when auditing and reviewing my data, I revisited the collection of notes on my decisions taken during the research process, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials used, findings presentation, and data management information (Patton, 2015). Another strategy to ensure confirmability is reflexivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that reflexivity is, “An attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process. I also continued to implement the strategy member checking, which is another effective strategy for ensuring credibility and confirmability (Candela, 2019). One of the most important aspects of ensuring confirmability during this research study is that it establishes a barrier against bias and prejudice (Patton, 2015). When conducting research, it is important to ensure that it is presented in a way that allows other researchers to be conduct the same study, if desired. Ortlipp (2009) suggested that using a reflective journal can also help to achieve confirmability due to the fact that it may highlight the messiness of the research process to the researcher, who can then reveal it to people who read the study, avoiding the production, reproduction, and circulation of research

discourse as a tidy and linear process. Finally, I reported all research perspectives, positions, attitudes, and beliefs.

Ethical Procedures

One of the main tasks as a psychologist and researcher is following the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of psychologists and code of Conduct. Also, Walden University requires all research to be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the university's ethical standards were followed for the study. Prior to collecting any data or even recruiting participants for my study, I made sure that IRB approval was given. In terms of ethics and research, privacy and ethics issues have been a hot topic in recent years, which is why it is so important to maintain all responsibilities to human participants must be followed, and they must be treated with respect by protecting their privacy and confidentiality at all times (Nunan, 2021). As researchers, we have the duty to make sure that all participants are informed about the research goals as well as the risks and advantages of participating. Consent forms were discussed and administered to all participants. I also made sure that all institutions will be protected in this research study as well. As stated previously, names of schools and administrators were kept confidential as well throughout the reporting process.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to learn about the experiences of individuals who are former foster youth that attended a community college and engaged in campus-based support groups or received assistance from student

services. The discussion of how interviews was conducted and how the data was analyzed was brought forth in this chapter. The main purpose of Chapter 3 was to describe the basic qualitative approaches that will be implemented to capture the true experiences and perspectives of the former foster youth in details.

As the researcher, I discussed the strategies that I implemented to ensure that this research study will be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable from start to finish. The criteria for the participants was also detailed within in Chapter 3. The participants must have been a part of foster care for 6 month or more, attended a community college in the state of Mississippi for at a full semester, which is typically 5-6 months. Chapter 3 also highlighted the procedure that took place to ensure that the participants were fully informed about the study, their role in the study and how they exited the study. Chapter 4 will contain a discussion of the findings from the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 4: Results

In this qualitative study, I investigated the community college experiences of former foster youth in the state of Mississippi. An additional goal of this study was to identify possible needs of former foster youth while transitioning into a community college. The research question for this qualitative phenomenological study was: What are the lived experiences of former foster youth with campus-based support groups, programs and student services on their community colleges campuses? To explore this research question, I completed eight semi-structured interviews with former foster youth who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi. In this chapter, I explained the personal or organizational factors that impacted participants or their experience at the time of the research that might affect how the results were interpreted. The study setting, participant demographics, explanations of data collecting and data analysis methods used, and evidence of trustworthiness are all presented in this chapter. In addition, I provided an in-depth synopsis of the results of the research.

Setting

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom application. Considering that interviews were conducted virtually, I completed each interview in private areas of my home to ensure the participants of their privacy rights. I also gave the participants the option of using the camera or not using the camera during the interview process to provide the participants with a sense of security. The Zoom platform allowed me to record each interview session and store all videos in a

secure cloud that can only be accessed by me. The interviews were also transcribed using the Zoom platform. However, the transcript was misconstrued, so I had to transcribe the videos by listening and reviewing the recordings. In the process of transcribing the interviews, I did a thorough cleaning of all interview transcripts. After the interview transcripts were complete, I emailed each participant a copy of the interview transcript so that the participants could review them for accuracy. Each participant provided confirmation that the interview transcripts were accurate.

Demographics

The volunteers for this qualitative study consisted of eight African American foster care alumni, between the ages of 20 to 25 who aged out of foster care and attended a community college in the state of Mississippi for 6 months or more. Table 1 provides an outline of the demographic details for each participants. Seven of the participants were African American females between the ages of 18-25. One participant was a 22-year-old African American male. Seven of the participants were in the state's custody until the age of 18. One participant was released from custody at age 19. All participants were in foster care for 5 years or more due to the death of a parent, parent drug addiction, or parent incarceration.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Sex	Race	Yrs. in foster care	# of Colleges
Participant 1	20	Female	Black	13	1
Participant 2	20	Female	Black	17	1
Participant 3	22	Female	Black	10	2
Participant 4	22	Female	Black	18	2
Participant 5	23	Male	Black	3	1
Participant 6	21	Female	Black	12	1
Participant 7	25	Female	Black	19	2
Participant 8	24	Female	Black	5	1

Data Collection

Data collection began after receiving approval from Walden University's IRB (approval number 03-11-22-0754475). The data collection method corresponds to the recruitment method presented in Chapter 3. However, I only completed eight interviews due to data saturation and receiving repetitive information from each participant. Data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015) signifies that no new information will be provided that will improve or affect a study's conclusions. Therefore, after analyzing the first six interview transcripts, I discovered that no new ideas or codes were being developed from the data. However, I completed two more interviews to ensure that data saturation had been truly reached and to ensure that there was no new information to be discovered about services that community colleges, foster care case workers, or the state provided these youth during their transitions from custody. The average time for the interviews were 40-60 minutes per participant. Considering that phenomenological study interviews are 60-90 minutes, I wanted to be conscious of the times of the participant considering

that they were all current college students, except for one participant. Prior to the interviews, during the consent and recruitment process, I encouraged the participants to start thinking about their experiences to help make their interviews run smoother and shorter. Each study participant completed in-depth virtual interviews. Each participant chose where to be for their side of the virtual connection and they were given the choice of participating from a smartphone, laptop, tablet, or desktop computer. I assured that each participant as well as myself as the interviewer, was in a secure, private, and confidential setting where we could comfortably complete the interview. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom application and saved to a secure cloud that can only be accessed using a personal username and password. The eight participant interview transcripts were compared, contrasted, and assessed. I sent each participant a copy of the transcript to double check its accuracy, to ensure that member checking was conducted for this study. Table 2 provides an in-depth breakdown of each participant's interview time.

Table 2

Length of Interviews

Participant	Interview Time
Participant 1	55 minutes 19 secs
Participant 2	46 minutes 03 secs
Participant 3	39 minutes 36 secs
Participant 4	45 minutes 16 secs
Participant 5	38 minutes 36 secs
Participant 6	46 minutes 35 secs
Participant 7	50 minutes 20 secs
Participant 8	59 minutes 10 secs

Data Analysis

I gathered information through a semistructured interview with each participant. Throughout each semi-structured interview with participants, I referenced the interview guide I developed. Transcribing the data, coding the data, synthesizing codes into broader themes, and writing up the conclusions were all part of the data analysis process. To begin, I manually transcribed all the interviews and then translated the information into a Microsoft Word document. I began taking notes on the initial codes after reading and reviewing transcriptions to gain a general understanding of the participant's comments in relation to the research question. To code as much as possible, I went through my data line by line, which helped me establish detailed codes. I used inductive coding to code my data because it allowed me to start from scratch and generate codes based on the qualitative data, which led to all of the codes emerging directly from the interview responses. To identify which codes were most prevalent in the interview data, I used thematic coding to assess the participants' experiences. This process gave me a precise and practical understanding of what the participants experienced and what they needed as a student on a community college campus.

After manually coding all the interview transcripts, I also downloaded and used the NVivo software as another tool to aid generating codes. I used NVivo for the auto-code option to double check my coding correctness and to see if I had overlooked any possible codes or coding material. I also used this software to ensure that all codes were generated entirely from the semistructured interview data. NVivo is a highly rated tool with several advantages, including the ability to organize data both written and recorded

data into folders (QSR International NVivo, 2020). However, although I used this electronic coding software, I personally checked for accuracy of all codes generated by the program, which was my obligation as the researcher (see Saldana, 2016). So, with the combination of my cognitive analytic reflections and the software's ability to provide useful data, all codes were generated for this study. The following codes were consistent amongst all interviews and was compiled from the data: supportive roles, foster care system, college campus, mentorship, applications, scholarships, coach, foster care student, peer support, college prep, relationships, special assistance, supportive, financial aid, cheer, guidance, campus organizations, "someone to talk", mental health support, basketball, college, counseling, life, and support groups.

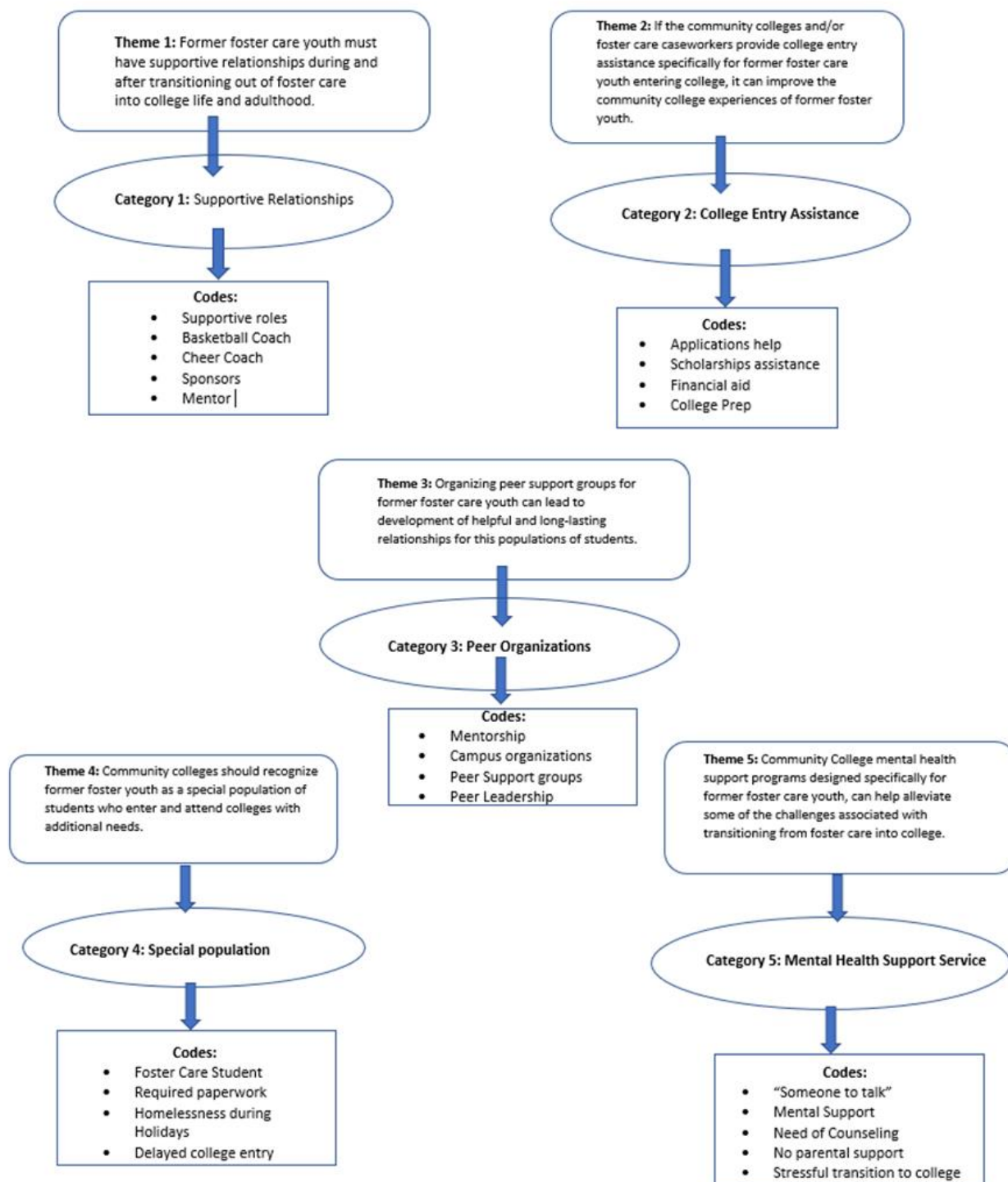
After the codes were established, I made notes of all the terms and phrases used by the eight participants that were repeated and consistent to create the categories. For example, I analyzed each participants' response in regard to the support that they received from faculty members on their campus. In analyzing their responses, all the participants repeatedly expressed how the supportive relationships with 1 or more faculty members on campus supplied them with the support that they needed while matriculating through community college. Therefore, as seen below in Figure 3, the supportive relationships category was derived from the code words such basketball coach, cheer coach, mentor, and supportive roles, which was the representation of the participants' experiences with the support of faculty members on their campus.

The categories consisted of (a) supportive relationships, (b) community college mental health support services, (c) special population services, (d) peer organizations, and

(e) college entry assistance. The categories were determined based on the similarities in the participants tones and shared similar experiences. The keywords used to form these categories were developed based on the experiences revealed by the participants throughout the interviews. As I was able to observe the patterns emerging, I examined the data by combining the codes, categories and deriving interpretations from the interviews to develop the themes for this study (Saldana, 2016).

Figure 3

Thematic Analysis Process: Codes & Categories



The themes that were developed conveyed meanings from the data in relation to the research question. The semi-structured interview data was gathered and examined to help answer the research question. The emerging themes were as follows:

1. Former foster care youth must have supportive relationships during and after transitioning out of foster care into college life and adulthood.
2. If the community colleges and/or foster care caseworkers provide college entry assistance specifically for former foster care youth entering college, it can improve the community college experiences of former foster youth.
3. Organizing peer support groups for former foster care youth can lead to development of helpful and long-lasting relationships for this populations of students.
4. Community colleges should recognize former foster youth as a special population of students who enter and attend colleges with additional needs.
5. Community College mental health support programs designed specifically for former foster care youth, can help alleviate some of the challenges associated with transitioning from foster care into college.

Figure 4*Thematic Analysis Process: Themes & Participants Statements*

Themes	Participant Statements
Theme 1: Need for Supportive Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My basketball Coaches made sure.... • I had a mentor from the Big Brother & Big Sister program • The GED Program Director helped me with getting into college... • You have to go out and seek someone that you can trust... • I confided in my coach and she knew everything that was going on... • My casework came from a non-profit, but she did not help in anyway... • I received a scholarship through her program... • I didn't have any challenges only because my coach made sure everything was done with schedules and housing.
Theme 2: Need for College-Entry Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I applied, I needed additional documentation, which sometimes create a delay... • They had people to help, but you had to go find the help.... • There were people to help, but I still did not know what to do.... • College was my last resort, I did not have anywhere to go... • I did not have help with completing financial aid... • I was just thrown out there...I did not know what to do
Theme 3: Need for Peer Support groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it should be a Big Brother/Big Sister program.... • Make sure you go, find help even amongst yours peers.... • It was easier to bond with those people because they understood... • I feel that we should have group every 2 weeks... • I was a part of SGA and Student Support Services... • Strictly for foster care students.... we should have meetings to keep up with each other... • I connected with a few classmates that were in foster care...
Theme 4: Need to address former foster youth as a Special population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I went to college, it was a good experience, but on the holidays, I did not have anywhere to go... • I feel like they should have a Social Worker on campus who understands... • I feel like they should have systems in place to teach us.... • I would love to see something strictly for foster care students... • It can be hard on others who do not have a basketball coach... • I was planning to stay on campus, but they did not have any rooms available... • I think they should have someone to guide foster care youth...
Theme 5: Need for Mental Health Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a part of a mental health awareness group on campus helped... • Check on them weekly or daily... • We need just someone to talk to... • I had a counselor in foster care but I lost the service when I aged out.... • Support groups and counseling that meet maybe 2 times a week...

None of the participants received services specifically for former foster care youth from community colleges or caseworkers. However, some of the participants did receive assistance from the supportive relationships that the students developed with different campus faculty, such as coaches and different campus organization sponsors. After reviewing the codes, categories, and themes, there was no cases of discrepancies.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and procedures employed to ensure the quality of a study (Connelly, 2016). It is a researcher's responsibility to follow protocols and procedures to make sure all data and information presented in the study is credible and believable. During the data collection process and even during the data interpretation process, for the results to be helpful and sustain integrity, trustworthiness is required. The researcher's aim is to ensure dependability, credibility, and conformability of the findings in qualitative research so that future researchers can have trust in the findings' transferability to other environments and contexts.

Credibility

According to Cope (2014), credibility refers to the integrity of the data or participant viewpoints, as well as the researcher's interpretation and depiction of the data. Considering that the credibility of a study can be influenced by the researcher, it is important for the researcher to avoid not just verbal but also nonverbal bias during an interview, such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures. For this qualitative study, I maintained an unbiased posture and tone during each interview. I also

avoided suggesting ideas or my opinion during the interview process. To establish credibility, each participant received a full copy of the interview transcripts via email. The participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts in its entirety to ensure that all information recorded and translated was accurate. I asked participants to present any changes needed. No participant required any changes to their interview transcripts or to the interpretations of the data. Member checking is one of the most common approaches used by qualitative researchers to establish credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability

When establishing transferability, the researcher must remember that their tasks only consist of showing evidence that the research study finding's might be useful instead of guaranteeing readers that the conclusions of the research study will be useful (citation). To accomplish transferability, the focus of the researcher proofing that the findings of a research study may be applied to various locations, circumstances, times, and populations (Patton, 2015). In this study, I provided a detailed step by step process of how interviews were conducted and the demographic information about the participants. Providing the audience, a detailed account of the phenomena being studied is vital for the audience to gain a thorough comprehension of it, allowing them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research study to those that have occurred in their own situations (Miles et al., 2019).

Dependability

The next important form of trustworthiness that should be established in qualitative research dependability. It simply means that the researcher must assess whether the analytic technique follows the accepted criteria for a certain design (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Throughout this study, maintaining a detailed audit trail made the process of establishing dependability an easy task to accomplish.

To establish dependability, I completed the following tasks:

- Established the study's specific goal,
- Discussed how and why the participants for the study were chosen,
- Described how the data was acquired and how long it took to collect it,
- Described how the data was reduced or changed before being analyzed,
- Discussing the findings' interpretation and presentation, and
- Described the methods for determining the data's trustworthiness

Dependability was also established through the usage of comments from my committee to address any concerns throughout the study.

Confirmability

Once credibility, transferability, and reliability have been established, confirmability occurs, which gave me the idea of using an audit trail to not only establish dependability, but as well as confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher's responsibility of remaining objective and impartial throughout the entire study creates confirmability. Considering how passionate I am about this study, I made sure that all interpretations, codes, themes and implications, all derived directly from the data and not

from my own imaginations in the interpretations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). My last strategy to confirmability consisted of using reflexivity to any detect biases and to defend the results' integrity, which included reviewing my observations in all of the interview sessions, transcripts, and journal notes repeatedly.

Study Results

The research question for this study focused on the lived experiences of former foster youth with campus-based support groups, programs and student services on their community colleges campuses. Each participant within this study explained that they did not have receive any additional services from the community colleges that they attended, as former foster care youth. However, each participant did find additional support from different campus faculty, sports programs and campus organizations. As stated by all of the participants, having those type of supportive relationships helped the participants transition smoothly and survive on their community college campus. The participants also expressed that having additional support on a community college campus as a former foster care youth, would have benefited them greatly, due to the challenges of enrolling in classes, knowing what classes to take, completing financial aid, moving on campus, and providing the additional required paperwork that former foster care youth must submit when entering college.

All of the participants did not have the opportunity to bond with a coach, as some of the other participants on their campuses, which is why the participants expressed the need for mentorship programs. The participants also believed that having peer groups and organizations designed for former foster youth, would create a better experience for all

former foster care youth on community college campuses. All of the participants also expressed that having mental health services for the special population of former foster youth would help alleviate some of the anxiety and issues associated with transitioning from foster care to community college. Considering that none of the participants received any help from their caseworkers as they transitioned out of foster care into the real world or college, the participants explained that community colleges should have services readily available designed specifically for this special population of students because a lot of them enter college on their own, with no help. One participant explained that even after the struggle of leaving the system and entering college was conquered, she still faced the challenge of not having anywhere to go when the college closed for holidays.

Theme 1

The first theme that the data presented was the need for former foster youth to have supportive and long-lasting relationships during and after they transition out of foster care to a college campus. Three of the participants relied heavily on their coaches for assistance with enrolling into school, moving on campus, completing class schedules, receiving scholarships and graduating. From analyzing their overall experience, these students expressed that they had little to no issues while attending their community college. The remaining 5 participants stated that joining campus organizations and programs gave them the opportunity to meet and connect with faculty members that provided support while attending their community college. However, after graduating and leaving the college, the participants explained that they lost some of those relationships.

One participant shared the assistance she received from the Big Brother/Big Sister

Mentoring program:

I did not receive a caseworker, but I was a part of the Big Brother/Big Sister program and my mentor helped me with everything. If it were not for her, I would not have made it. She even encouraged me to open-up to others when I arrived on campus. She told me not to stay in my room, but to go out and make friends on campus. She was an amazing mentor. She even helped me with completing all of my applications.

All of the participants stated that they did not receive any support from caseworkers after transitioning out of foster care. One participant shared the following experience of exiting the foster care system:

I was released from custody while I was on campus at school. I was supposed to have a court date, but I did not have one. All she did was told me that I was released with no help or guidance. I was just thrown out there on my own. I was lost and did not know what to do. I still feel like there is a lot that I do not know even now. I feel like I am so behind and I am still learning how to do things that I did not learn at school or while in foster care.

Even though this student managed to connect with her GED program director, she still feels that other former foster youth should have the additional support from caseworkers while attending a community college. She expressed that community colleges should have Social Workers on campus specifically for former foster youth,

which would make a difference in the lives of many other youth because they do not have anybody else to help.

Theme 2

All of the participants expressed the lack of college prep services that they did not receive while in foster care. Not being prepared for college, the participants faced various challenges with the basic college entry process. The participants expressed that they had to present paperwork showing that they were released from custody, which caused delays in their admission process. Only the three participants that were a part of a sport expressed that they did not have any challenges associated with the college-entry process. One of the participants shared the following experience of applying and entering college:

I attended school during COVID, so no one was really on campus to help. If you had a problem with financial aid or admissions, you had to go find the help. I missed out on being able to move on campus. I also had to take several classes over because I did not know what to take. I wish the college or a caseworker would have given some type of help on how to register for the correct classes.

Another participant shared her experience with applying to school.

I had a good experience on campus, but when I enrolled, I had to provide documentation that I was a former foster care youth. They do not let us in until we bring that paperwork, which can sometimes cause a delay in starting school. I had to provide documentation at both schools I attended.

As stated previously, the athletes were the only participants who did not have this struggle because their coaches took care of everything for the students. The other

participants expressed that the campus provided some help, but they still did not have proper guidance.

Theme 3

Within the interviews, I asked all participants what type of services that they would like to see implemented on college campuses and they all expressed the need to form student-led support groups just for former foster youth on campus. The participants shared that creating mentorship programs on campus would help students to come out of their shells. One participant shared her experience of connecting with other former foster youth:

I did connect with people that I went to the group home with on campus. It was just easier for me to connect those people. We shared some of the same experiences.

Another participant shared her experience:

I always stay to myself but I did connect with one of my cheer mates who grew up with her grandparents like I did. She understood what it was like to grow up with your grandparents. She understood me. We became friends on the team and we are still friends now.

Many of the participants discussed how it was difficult at first to connect with other students who were not former foster care youth, but they eventually meet some friends that they still have now. Three of the participants discussed how having those peer relationships are beneficial because there are things that a classmate can help you

with better than an adult. All of the participants were excited at presenting the ideas of having peer groups for former foster youth on campus.

Theme 4

One of the main challenges that the participants expressed was living on campus and not having an actual home to return to when the schools were closed for holidays. Two of the participants expressed that they actually transitioned from a group home directly to a college campus. They explained that this solved their issue of homelessness, but it did not solve the issues when the campuses would close down for different break during the holidays. One of the participants shared the following experience:

I had a good experience in college, but I did not have anywhere to go on the holidays. This was very frustrating because I was new to the campus and I did not have any friends that I could go home with during the break. However, my GED Director connected me to one of the former foster youth that I attended classes with and she allowed me to stay with her during the Christmas break. We spent Christmas with the director and her family because we did not have families to share the holiday with.

This participant explained that the school would not allow her to stay on campus because there would not be any faculty on campus and neither would the cafeteria be opened during the break. During this time, she also expressed that she did not have a car, which means she would be stranded on campus for 3 weeks. The other participants explained that they were able to return back to the homes of grandparents and aunts during the breaks, but it was still difficult because they knew that these situations were

temporary and that they would be back on their own after the different breaks. Despite this challenge, the participants expressed gratitude for having a community college to turn to during this time of transition because it saved them from homelessness. The participants expressed that attending a community college was their best and/or last option of survival after aging out of foster care.

Theme 5

Considering that participants were in foster care for long periods of times due the death of a parent, drug addiction, and incarceration, they all faced challenges in foster care at younger ages prior to attending a community college. Many of the youth disclosed private information about their situations in foster care that led to some difficult challenges. One of the challenges that the participants expressed was opening up and meeting new friends due to the issues they faced prior to entering college. All of the participants expressed the need for former foster care youth to have “just someone to talk to” during this transition. The only participant shared his views on mental health and ask for help:

Many of us blacks do not like to ask for help but we still need help offered to us.

Many of us do not have our parents to listen to us like other students. We just need someone trustworthy that we can just talk to.

Another participant expressed that she joined a mental health awareness group on campus that helped her while attending her community college. She explained that it was not specifically for former foster care youth, but she did benefit from the participating in the organization. One of the participants also explained that she had counseling services

provided for her mental health disorders prior to leaving the system, but after leaving the system and moving on campus without a car, she was unable to attend counseling sessions. She also explained that she no way of purchasing her medication as well, which led to her being removed from the campus. All of the participants suggested that counseling services should be offered for former foster care youth weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. They expressed that former foster youth like themselves needs this extra support from their community colleges.

Summary

In this study, I used a semi-structured interview method to interview the participants and to examine the data from their experiences. I sorted through the data searching for similarities and eliminating codes until there was nothing left. Categories and themes developed from the similarities and patterns. The themes derived from the data, led to many ways that I could answer the research questions. All 5 themes focused on supportive relationships, college-entry assistance, peer support groups, special population services, and mental health services. Overall, the participants expressed the challenges and experiences that they encountered while attending a community college in the state of Mississippi. Despite the challenges faced, the participants all provided positive feedback about faculty members or coaches on their community college campuses that they shared bonds with during their transition. Chapter 5 will be a detailed explanation of how the findings supported the theoretical frameworks' assumptions for this study. In Chapter 5, I will describe the results in greater depth, as well as the study's

limitations, implications for constructive social change, and research recommendations for the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of former foster youth who attended a community college and participated in campus-based support groups or received assistance from student services. In this study, I discovered that former foster youth on community college campuses need supportive relationships, college-entry assistance, peer support group organizations, special population services, and mental health support services. The participants in this study shared their experiences while attending community college as well as their recommendations of future services needed for former foster youth who are continuously attending college as a means of a survival. The overall themes for this study focused on the types of services that former foster youth need when they attend community colleges. All the participants explained that they did not receive any assistance from their caseworkers or the Mississippi Department of Human Services after they aged out of the system.

Considering the lack of assistance, the participants also explained that they were not prepared for college or living on their own. All the participants expressed that they knew attending a community college was the best decision for them considering the lack of assistance that they received from their caseworkers. All these findings add to previous studies by revealing more about the needs that former foster youth have after aging out of system. The findings of this study provide a fresh perspective and understanding of the lived experiences of foster former youth on community college campuses.

The study results also provide insight on how some community college faculty and staff are making a difference in the lives of some former foster youth. This final chapter interprets the study's findings, discusses how the study's theoretical framework may be used, discusses the study's limitations, proposes recommendations for future research, and addresses the implications for social change based on the study's findings.

Interpretations of the Findings

As explained in Chapter 4, the data results provided a clear perspective of the former foster youth experiences while attending a community college in the state of Mississippi. This study was guided by the following question: What are the lived experiences of former foster youth with campus-based support groups, programs, and student services on their community colleges campuses? Prior to this study, there were various researchers who completed studies on needs and services of former foster care youth on college campuses (e.g., Gillum et al., 2018; Gross et al., 2020; Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019; Haung et al., 2021; Hernandez et al., 2017; Hogan, 2020; Mardueno, 2019; Okpych & Courtney, 2017; Okpych et al., 2020; Schelbe et al., 2018; Watt, Faulkner, et al., 2019; White, 2018). These studies also provided the implication that studies should be conducted to determine the specific needs for this population of students on a college campus. However, for the state of Mississippi, no studies had been conducted to determine the needs of former foster care youth in this state.

For this study, eight African American former foster youth shared their community college experiences at community colleges that they attended in different

areas of the state. There are large quantities of former foster youth enroll into community colleges as a means of survival after aging out of the system at age 18 (Unrau, Dawson et al., 2012; Child Welfare, 2020a). However, when enrolling into these colleges and universities, this population of students enter college with a lot of needs considering that at age 18, they are considered legal adults (Child Welfare, 2020b). According to Hallet et al. (2018), when foster adolescents age out of the foster care system, enter college, and enter adulthood, they bring challenges into their new lives that are linked to their childhood experiences of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.

Entering into college with needs beyond the traditional services provided by colleges and universities, many of these youth struggle with this transition and in some cases, fail to graduate (Hogan, 2020). Considering the needs of former foster youth, colleges should recognize these youth as a special population on their campuses and provide more additional services for these students. In analyzing the interview transcripts, I could hear the hearts cry of these youth for the help they needed when entering college for the first time. Many of them explained how lost or confused they felt with enrolling in classes, applying for financial aid and moving on campus.

The evidence from the interviews supports the theory that former foster youth need those additional college-entry assistances to help them with enrolling in the correct classes, completing financial aid and more. According to Okpych and Courtney (2017), school encouragement is required throughout the enrollment process and until graduation at both 2-year and 4-year colleges, implying that colleges must ensure that former foster youth have access to and availability of additional support services on campus.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory discusses that for any individual to reach their highest potential, their basic needs of food, shelter, friends, intimate relationships, and feeling loved and safe must be met (Maslow, 1987). In all the study's participants experiences, there was evidence to support this theoretical frameworks and result predictions. All the participants expressed their need for the college residence halls, which saved them from homelessness. They also expressed how creating relationships with different faculty, staff, and friends on campus helped them survive and make it through the transition from foster care to college.

Haggman-Laitila et al. (2019) suggested that former foster youth need those additional supportive relationships when they are making that transition from foster care to adulthood and in this case, college life. Those supportive relationships are needed especially on a college campus, considering that they have already suffered the loss of friendships, parental relationships, and sibling relationships that most youth suffer from when they age out of foster care at age 18 (Haggman-Laitila et al., 2019). These youth also lose health care, counseling, emotional support, and the healthy connections that come with leaving foster care; this creates even more difficulty when transitioning out of foster care (Hallet et al., 2018). One of the participants explained that one of his challenges with moving on campus was leaving his siblings behind. Considering all of that emotional and mental trauma that they experience, these difficulties lead to academic issues that effects their ability to perform in their classes (Hallet et al., 2018).

According to Gross et al. (2020), former foster youth are more likely to be classified as having a low academic self-concept, lower levels of college involvement,

and a low feeling of science self-efficacy, which reduces their chances of successfully completing school with their degree. One participant explained how she had to take some classes repeatedly due to her lack of guidance and inability to perform academically. Two other participants attended two community colleges due to the inability to manage their mental health issues. All the participants repeatedly explained the need for peer support groups and mental health support services. Participant 4 explained how she lost her mental health counseling sessions after moving on campus because she did not have a car to make the sessions. The counselor even offered her Zoom sessions, but the lack of health insurance made it impossible to continue those services.

The experiences of the participants in my study support Hallet et al.'s (2018) suggestion of providing resources for counseling and a safe space on campus for support. As Maslow's theory suggested, it cannot be expected that this population of students can exceed academically when they have mental health challenges and no support. Providing these youth with college-entry services can help community colleges learn and understand the needs of this population of students from time they enroll until they graduate (Okpych & Courtney, 2017). Each participant explained how they relied on that one coach or faculty member the entire time while attending the college. Having that extra support or "just someone to talk" helped all the participants survive and succeed in school. Three of the participants explained how having their teammates and coaches made their transition easier. Even though these participants succeeded and found that extra support on their campuses, it does not mean all former foster youth share this experience. In their final words, each participant recommended and explained what they

would like to see implemented for future former foster youth on campus. All of their suggestions coincided with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. They all passionately explained that community colleges must meet these youth where they are when they enroll into their college and help pull them up to the highest form of themselves, just as Maslow's (1970) suggested.

Limitations of the Study

For this qualitative study, some of the participants attended 1 or more community college in the state of Mississippi, which was a strength for the study. However, all participants were African American females, except for one participant, which was an African American male. I also used only eight participants for the sample size, considering the repetition in the stories shared by the participants. Therefore, the limitations for this study would be the inability to recruit participants from different races as well as the sample size of 8. Even though data saturation is not defined by the sample size, recruiting participants from different ethnic backgrounds could have possible presented new information (Fucsh and Ness, 2015).

I used social media as a recruitment tool, which gave me access to a variety of possible participants who were interested in participating, but they did not meet the all of the required criteria for the study. So, I would consider the age range of 18-25 and the focusing on individuals who attended a community college in the state of Mississippi could have been a limitation for this study. Purposefully sampling was used for the recruitment process, which required searching for individuals who had specific qualities and attributes with the representative group (Creswell, 2009). Considering that these

youths faced difficult times and experiences, they did not have any issues with community college experiences. All of the participants were on board with participating in this study to potentially help other former foster care youth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the results from the data, extending the age requirement could possibly lead to more information and experiences from the participants in future research. Many of the participants in the study were all in the same age range, which led to similar experiences. Future research should also focus on determining if new services and policies implemented are actually affected in improving the college experience of former foster youth on Mississippi community college campuses. Future researchers could also focus on former foster youth at 4-year universities in the state of Mississippi to determine if there are similarities in the needs of youth that attended a 2-year community college. Future researchers could also complete a comparison study on understanding the differences between 4-year private universities and 2-year public universities.

Considering that 4-year universities are larger in numbers and possibly have more resources than a 2-year community college, could lead to different experiences for these youth. Also, as some researchers suggested, the state of Mississippi could implement some of the services and programs that other states have implemented to determine if there is change in the success and graduation rates of former foster care youth (Geiger et al., 2018; Hallet et al., 2018; White, 2018). Future researchers may want to focus on investigating the college-prep services that former foster youth receive before leaving the

system. Improving these services while the youth are still in custody could make their transition into college and adulthood less challenging. Lastly, from a scientific approach, researchers can conduct a study on brain development in relation to former foster youth being released from custody at age 18 and considered adults. Future researchers could possibly prove scientifically that these youth may not be prepared to live as adults on their own at age 18. Providing the scientific aspect to the study could provide a more convincing aspect to understanding the needs of former foster youth not just in the state of Mississippi, but globally.

Implications

The results from this study not only challenges community colleges in the state of Mississippi, but also 4-year universities, the Mississippi Department of Human Services, and even legislators. The participants and their experiences has enlightened the state of Mississippi that we should do a better job at serving our former foster youth after aging out of the system at age 18. This particular study gave former foster youth an opportunity to be heard and recognized. Investigating the challenges that former foster adolescents face after they leave the foster care system at the age of 18, as well as listening and assessing these youth's needs when they begin college is critical to improving the lives of former foster youth in Mississippi (Geiger at al., 2018 & Okpych et al., 2020).

The crime and suicide rates amongst the youth in the state of Mississippi are at an all-time high. If legislators and law makers stop and look into the lives of the trouble youth of this state, there is a possibility that the young adult was a former foster youth who was not able or prepared to attend college as a means of survival. At that point, who

is to blame for these youths' mistakes. Researchers have already suggested it is not an easy task at improving the services and policies that legislators and colleges have in place, but there is no excuse for these former foster youth to be ignored and overlooked (Jackson et al., 2019). Even if community colleges just focus on providing mental health services and improving their admission processes, this could be a start of a better future for these youth. With research consistently providing evidence that these youth need community colleges to survive, it is job of Mississippi Community College Board in the state of Mississippi to take in depth look into how we can better serve former foster youth so that lives and futures can be changed (Geiger et al., 2018; Hogan, 2020; Okpych et al., 2020; White, 2018).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the type of services that community colleges in the state of Mississippi have available for former foster youth. This study focused on understanding the needs of former foster youth when enrolling into a Mississippi community college. The results from this study revealed that former foster youth are in need supportive relationships, college-entry services, peer support organizations, mental health support services and to be recognized as a special population on community college campuses. All of the participants suggested that having these types of services could alleviate some of the challenges that former foster youth face when transitioning out of foster care into adulthood and college life. The evidence from this study also proved that there is a lack of services provided for former foster youth on community college campuses within the state of Mississippi. Considering that the

participants did not receive any additional services from the Mississippi Department of Services after aging out of the foster care system, community colleges should have services and policies in place to readily serve this population of students. Providing former foster youth with additional services could not increase the graduation and retention rate for former foster youth, but also change lives and help create more productive citizens for the state of Mississippi.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide/Protocol

Introductory Statement

Hello. Again, my name is Jerrica Stimage, a current PhD candidate at Walden University. I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. I truly appreciate you. As previously stated, I would like to ask you questions regarding your experience as a foster care student and your experience as college a student here in the state of Mississippi. I will ask you some questions that maybe personal, but at any given time we can stop the interview. This interview is voluntary. So, if you decide to take part now, you can still change your mind later.

If you don't have any questions, let's get started.

Interview Protocol

I will send all participants the zoom link for their interviews the day before to ensure that all technical difficulties can be addressed the day before.

- 1.) Enter the zoom room and the recording will start as soon as the room is opened
- 2.) I will introduce myself to the participant, thank them for their participation again and provide them with another brief summary of what the study entails.
- 3.) I will give the participant another opportunity to confirm or deny their participation.
- 4.) If participation is confirmed verbally, I will proceed to implement the procedure to introduce participant(s) with a pseudonym and coded identities.
- 5.) I will begin the interview and proceed through the interview until all questions have been answered

- 6.) When all questions have been answered, I will give the participant the opportunity to provide any additional information or comments
- 7.) I will wrap-up the interview by explaining how we would handle the member checking process. I will discuss the timeline of when I will provide them with the transcribed data from the interview
- 8.) Thank the participant(s) for volunteering for the study.
- 9.) Provide the participant with my contact information again for follow up questions and concerns.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- 1.) For starters, can you tell me a little about yourself and some of your experiences that you've encountered in foster care that contributed to your decision to attend a community college? Was college your last option of survival? Please elaborate on the day, you made the decision to attend a community college in the state of Mississippi?
- 2.) Can you explain any college prep or independent living workshops, programs or trainings that you received while in foster care and were they beneficial? If not, do you think receiving these trainings would have made you more prepared for the transition into college and the "real world" of adult hood?
- 3.) Can you explain any challenges you faced while applying and enrolling into a Mississippi community college? Did you encounter issues with moving on to campus? Were there any personal challenges that you faced that was non-related to school?
- 4.) Were you assigned a caseworker when you exited the foster care system? If so, did you receive any assistance from your caseworker with enrolling into your community college, moving on campus or completing financial aid? Please explain the support or assistance that you received.
- 5.) If you were not assigned a caseworker when you exited the foster care system, did you receive any support from anyone when you decided to enroll into college, move on campus, complete class schedules, etc.? If you received any assistance, in detail, how did this individual(s) assist you and was it beneficial to have their support?

6.) While attending the community college, did you ever connect with other former foster care youth? Was it hard to develop relationships with your peers? Were you apart of any campus support groups, even if they did not relate to foster care? If you do not participate in any support groups, do you think having some of type of support group on campus would have made your transition easier?

7.) Did any faculty or staff on the college campus assist you with completing your financial aid, college application, or resident hall application? In what ways, was their assistance helpful? Did they offer you assistance just for enrollment or did you they play a supportive role throughout your college years at the school?

8.) What services would you like to see provided by your college and foster care casework, for foster care students like yourself? Can you give me example?

9.) What advice would you give foster care students who are interested in enrolling in a community college here in the state of Mississippi?

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

Name:

2. State/Country

3. E-Mail:

4. Telephone:

5. What is your age?

6. Ethnicity (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity:

- a. Nonresident Alien
- b. Hispanics of any race
- c. American Indian or Alaska Native
- d. Asian
- e. Black or African American
- f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- g. White
- h. Two or more races
- i. Race and Ethnicity Unknown
- j. Other (please specify)
- k. Prefer not to respond

7. Are you currently attending or have attended a community college in the state of Mississippi for at least 6 months? If yes, please indicate what community college are you attending or have attended?

8.) At any time in your life, have you been a foster care youth? If so, how long were you in the state's custody?

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at